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10/27/37 OR, The Queen of the Coast.

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AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTE-
ZUMA, THE MERCILESS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. THE SAILOR'S RETURN.

"AHA! my haughty beauty, my fair Water Lily of the Kennebec, you have grown into a beautiful woman, since last I saw your face.

"Come, don't be shy of me, as in the long ago, but grasp my hand in welcome home, after my three long years' absence in foreign seas."

The speaker was a young man of twenty-four or five, clad in the undress uniform of the United States navy of four-score years ago, but with marks upon his shoulders that showed that his straps of rank had been removed.

He wore also a sword-belt, but no blade, and his appearance was that of one who had been drinking deeply, for his face was flushed, his eyes inflamed and his manner reckless.

He had just sprung ashore from the deck of a small packet schooner, which in those days plied

"I SWEAR TO YOU, CAPTAIN MAYNARD, THAT I SHALL NOT AGAIN TOUCH THE WHEEL BUT LET YOUR VESSEL AND ALL ON BOARD GO TO DESTRUCTION, UNLESS YOU RELEASE THE PRISONER IN YOUR C BIN!"

between Boston and the towns on the Kennebec, and his point of landing was a village upon that romantic river, which has been the theater of so many scenes of daring in the days of our early history, and the home of as hardy and bold a set of seamen as ever furled a sail or fought a foe.

It was just before sunset, and as the little schooner had not been expected until the next morning, having made an exceptionally good run, there were not the usual number of persons upon the little pier, just below the town, when she arrived.

One of these was the one to whom the young sailor spoke the words that open this story, and she had just sprung ashore from a small skiff in which she had run up the river ahead of the schooner, and her management of the little sail-boat, in its race with the large vessel the past few miles, had won for her the admiration of those upon the deck of the packet.

She was a young girl of seventeen, with a form the perfection of womanly symmetry and grace, and the easy movement and pose of one who possessed a strength and endurance not looked for in one of her years and sex.

She was dressed in a close-fitting bodice, a skirt that was a trifle short, displaying a pair of tiny feet clad in stout shoes, and upon her head was a sailor's tarpaulin that gave her a jaunty air.

Her eyes were large, dark blue, fringed with long lashes, and her hair a sunny hue of brown that was golden in the sunlight, and hung in a waving mass adown her back, reaching far below her waist.

Her face was one to win admiration from the most casual observer, for it was beautiful, tender in expression, yet as fearless and resolute as though she had been of the sterner sex.

She had tied the painter of her little boat about a post, to make it fast, lowered her sail, and taking a large basket on her arm, was starting toward the village, when the packet schooner ran alongside the dock and the young sailor sprung out, raising his cap politely, and saluted her.

Her face flushed, and she hesitated an instant, then held forth her hand frankly, while she said:

"I have not forgotten you, Midshipman Brandon, nor that twice you saved my life, and if a word of welcome borne from me affords you pleasure gladly do I give it."

He took her hand, bent his head gracefully, and would have imprinted a kiss thereon, but she quickly withdrew it, and, while her face became crimson, bowed and walked on toward the village, the sailor looking after her with an expression of sorrow in his face.

"Who is she, shipmate?" asked a man dressed in seaman's attire stepping toward him, and having just come ashore from the schooner.

"She is one that such as you can never know."

"She is a pure, innocent girl, whose life I twice saved years ago, and one whose friendship I am unworthy to claim," was the bitter response, and turning on his heel the young sailor went to the side of the schooner to look after his luggage, which two hands were putting ashore.

"You carry a large cargo, shipmate," said the man who had before spoken to him, pointing to the several trunks, bales and bundles being taken from the schooner.

"Yes, they are souvenirs I have picked up in foreign lands—ah! there is a cartman whom I can hire," and the sailor called to a man, who just then drove up with a light wagon.

"Ho, Saunders, I have a job for you."

"Ah, Midshipman Brandon, or rather Lieutenant, you are now, I am glad to see you back home," said the man, coming toward him.

"No, Saunders, it is not lieutenant, though such was my last rank, or middy either, for I am no longer in the service," and the young man spoke with a bitterness of tone that was marked.

"No longer an officer of the navy, sir?" said the man in a surprised manner.

"No, and as it will doubtless be village gossip soon, I may as well tell you, that I had my shoulder-straps torn off, and was dismissed, while I barely escaped acquaintance with the yard-arm, and all because I killed a brute of a superior officer for insulting me."

"I was drinking, Saunders, my life-long curse I suppose, and when the wine is in the wit is out, so I resented the treatment I received and here I am, bag and baggage, no longer a shining light in the service of my country."

"But tell me, have you heard from my people at Brandon Hall, of late?"

"Your father drove through the village a week or so ago, sir: but I am sorry to hear of your ill-fortune aboard ship, Master Noel, as I had an idea you'd make a name for yourself some day, although you were a little wild, I do not deny."

"We'll not speak of that, Saunders; but talk business, for I wish you to drive me and my traps over home."

"I cannot go myself, sir, for I have a sick child I dare not leave; but after nightfall, the wagon is at your service, and Silly Sam will drive you over."

"That will do, as I can take supper at the tavern, so tell Silly Sam to come for me there,

after he has loaded on my traps, and as it will be late before we get over, I will keep him there all night, that is if the old folks will welcome home a disgraced son," and with a harsh laugh the young sailor walked on toward the village, half a mile distant, while the schooner, having discharged the quota of freight and passengers for that landing, held on her way up the river.

"Just who is that young man, shipmate?" asked the seaman who had addressed the sailor, and had, like himself, been a passenger on board the little packet.

He addressed Saunders, the village cartman, who answered:

"His name is Noel Brandon, and his folks live some miles from here, where his father is a wealthy farmer: but I'm sorry to know the young man is in bad luck now, as he once did me a favor, and though a trifle wild, he's not a bad fellow."

"He gambles heavy, I guess," continued the man.

"Maybe, but that I don't know about," answered Saunders.

"I do, for I saw him win a cool ten thousand at cards the other night in Boston."

"Ten thousand? Why that's a fortune," cried Saunders.

"It is indeed; but he took it as cool as if it was only a hundred; but where can I get a boat to hire here, for I have come up on business to see the widow Darrell, who lives on the other shore, a mile below here."

"Yes, she lives round the bend; but why didn't you get the skipper of the schooner to land you there?"

"He was in a hurry to get on, and I thought if I'd get a boat here, I could come back to the tavern in the village to-night, to wait for the next packet down."

"You can hire a boat from that man coming there," and Saunders pointed to an old boatman then approaching the dock.

The seaman approached the old boatman, dickered with him awhile for a boat, and then springing into it went at a swift pace down the river, holding over toward the other shore.

After rounding the bend a small frame house came into view, and ceasing to row he rested upon his oars, gazing at the place with a strange look upon his face.

"And that was my home in the long ago!"

"Ay, it would be now, were I to go there, for a mother never casts a son off be he what he may."

"Twelve years ago I left that home because I thought I had killed the very one whose track I am now on."

"Twelve years have changed him from the boy of thirteen, to the handsome, dashing young officer, and those years have changed me from the youth of seventeen into the man of thirty, and this long beard and gray hair make me look much older, and no one would know me now."

"Why, I talked to Noel Brandon time and time again on our run up here, and he knew me not, nor did Saunders and old boatman Brail recognize me, for I was a beardless boy then, and my whitening hair and beard make me look so different that I doubt if even my mother will know me."

"That old home is where I was born, and yonder I see the cows wending their way homeward, as they did long years ago."

"They are not the same cattle, I know, but they look the same, and the old place is little changed."

"The trees have grown larger, but all else is unchanged."

"Yonder is the rock from which I used to spring into the river, for a swim in the warm summer days, and back yonder in the hills I hunted for game."

"Ah me! those olden times are forever gone, and now, a sin-stained man I come back to the scene of my sinless boyhood."

"And do I come repentant, to fall at my mother's feet and beg forgiveness?"

"Ah no! I come for revenge and for gold."

His voice had softened at first, as he spoke of the past; but now it broke forth in uttering the last words, in almost savage intensity.

A moment he was silent, resting upon his oars, as his boat drifted with the current, and then he said aloud:

"Noel Brandon, I have not forgotten our schoolboy days together, and how you, years my junior, humbled me before all by your superior knowledge."

"I have not forgotten that one day, when I sought to thrash Silly Sam, who ran off with my ball, that you dealt me a blow that well-nigh cost me my life."

"One day we met, you mounted on your pony returning home from the village, I wandering along the river-bank with my rifle."

"The devil tempted me then, and I turned and fired upon you."

"But I heard a loud cry, as your pony bounded away, leaving you lying in the roadway dead, as I believed, and I saw Silly Sam coming along the river path."

"He saw me, had seen my act, and in turn I fled, swimming the river to my home, and my mother gave me all the money she had, and mounting our old cart-horse, I made my escape."

"Those scenes come before me to-day, as though they were but yesterday."

"And since then?"

"Ah, what have I not passed through in the years that have gone by!"

"And now I am home again, but not to see my mother, but because I met Noel Brandon in Boston, saw him win a large sum at the gambling-table, and determined to take it from him."

"My plot to rob him has thus far worked well, and now I will see if my shipmates have carried out the plan I laid for them to follow."

"Ah! there is my mother standing in the door, and she is gazing at me."

"But little she dreams that this boat holds her wandering sailor son."

"Oh, God! to gaze upon that dear face almost tempts me to repent of the past and be content to throw myself at her feet, there to live the remaining years of my life."

"But no! I must not be tempted to yield to the good, for my life can be one only of sin," and seizing the oars he sent the boat spinning rapidly down the river, while the setting sun cast its rays upon the little cottage, and fell upon the form of a gray-haired woman standing in the door, gazing out upon the river, and with her eyes resting upon the sailor, no thought in her heart that she was looking upon her wayward, wandering boy, whose evil life and long absence had caused her so many bitter heart-aches.

CHAPTER II.

WAYLAID.

AFTER the man in the skiff, Darke Darrell, had rounded a bend in the river, he beheld, creeping close in toward the other shore, and under shortened sail, a small sloop.

"Ah! there is the sloop, and now Noel Brandon, your gold and your booty are mine," said the man, the prodigal son, who had returned to the scenes of his boyhood, not repentant of his sins, but to rob, perhaps to kill one who had been his companion in the bygone.

Seizing his oars, as he sighted the sloop, for he had been listlessly drifting on the current, he sent his boat rapidly toward the little craft.

The shadows of night were darkening the waters, as he drew near the sloop, which now had glided into a little cove, and rounding to had dropped anchor, though still having her mainsail set.

"Ho, Jenks, you are here and just on time," cried Darrell, as he ran his skiff alongside the sloop, addressing one of the men who stood on the deck.

"Yes, Cap'n Darke, we followed in the wake of the packet as rapid as we could, and here we are," answered the man addressed as Jenks.

"Well, you and Toddy Tom have earned the gold I intend to pay you, or rather you will do so soon, for in a couple of hours the man who carries it will be along here."

"Where?"

"The highway runs along the river-bank, just a cable length from here, and we'll waylay him there."

"I'm ready," said Jenks.

"And me too," remarked Toddy Tom, who had the appearance of a man who kept about half-drunk all the time.

In fact he said he was afraid to get perfectly sober as his conscience was then troublesome.

But he had his wits about him, and was as thoroughly a villain as was Jenks, and that was saying a great deal.

Darke Darrell however knew his men, and having seen Noel Brandon gambling in Boston, heard his name, and recognizing him as his old boyhood enemy, he determined to avenge himself and gain gold at the same time, so had tracked his intended victim, laid his plans and set sail with him on the Kennebec packet, leaving his hirelings to follow and take advantage of any circumstance that might turn up in their favor.

He knew that Noel Brandon had not only the large sum of money he had seen him win, but other gold which had doubtless been paid him aboard ship, as prize-money, and he was confident that the baggage and bales he carried, were valuable booty.

"It will be a rich haul for me, and I can buy and fit out a schooner with it for a free life upon the seas, and then I'll soon make a fortune," he muttered, as he rowed ashore with his two comrades.

Reaching the bank, the boat was placed with the stern against the shore, and the oars in the rowlocks, so that she could be rowed away without an instant of delay.

The sloop had been left with her anchor down, but the cable was ready to slip, the mainsail up and the jib could be run up in a second.

Before landing, Darke Darrell, who recalled every foot of ground, led the way up into the forest, where the road crossed a narrow bridge, spanning a rivulet.

A high cliff, fringed with scrub pines overhung the road here, and no better place for a dark deed of deviltry could be found than this spot.

"Shipmates, the village lies yonder, and the wagon will pass here, drawing up for the bridge, and right here is our stand."

"It is light enough for you to see the surroundings, where the boat lies, and just what to do."

"You, Toddy, seize the horse, and Jenks you take the right hand side with your gun ready, while I'll step out and demand the gold from the young man."

"How many will there be of 'em?" asked Jenks.

"The horse, the lieutenant, and then a young idiot they call Silly Sam."

"Two to get away with?"

"Two to handle but don't kill 'em unless you have to."

"I understand; but if they show fight?"

"We must get the drop on them before they have a chance to show fight; but if they don't heed, why then, Jenks, you drop one and I'll do the same for the other."

"Now get your bearings down fine, get the lay of the boat, and the sloop, for it's going to be dark in these woods soon, in spite of the moonlight."

While this plot was going on in the forest, a league below the village, other scenes were transpiring which seemed to be just working into the hands of the trio of sailors.

Noel Brandon had gone up to the tavern, "The Flag Ship," as it was called by the jolly old host, Captain Buntline, himself an old sailor, who had lost his leg in battle, and recognizing there those whom he had met before, he at once called all about the bar and treated with an open-handedness that soon had the frequenters of the tap-room half seas over.

A good supper was set for the young sailor by mine host Buntline, and then Silly Sam arriving with the cart, loaded down with luggage, several glasses more all round were called for by Noel Brandon, his score was paid, and with a heated brain he sprung upon the seat by the side of the driver and started for his home, to which he was returning in disgrace after years of absence.

"Well, Sam, how has the world used you?" said Noel Brandon lightly, addressing Silly Sam, as he drove away from the Flag Ship Tavern.

"I can't complain, sir, with the world; but I'd give much if I hadn't been born a fool," was the reply.

"You are not such a fool as people take you for, Sam," and Noel Brandon gazed at the tall, well-formed fellow, a giant in stature, but a child in brain, for the poor youth had indeed been sadly afflicted by the curse of almost thorough idiocy.

"Thankee, sir; but folks says I is a bigger fool than I looks, and it makes me feel bad to have 'em talk so!"

"Don't mind them, Sam."

"Thankee, sir: you was always good to me, Master Noel!"

"And always will be your friend, Sam; but it seems you have not forgotten me?"

"No, no, sir, I know you, and I don't forget, though my mind does get most things mixed up."

"Tell me, Sam, how about Madge Vernon?"

"She's alive, sir."

"I know that, for I saw her to-day as I landed, and she ran up the river ahead of us; but does she still live with her parents down on the river-bank?"

"Yes, sir, with her father, for her mother's dead."

"She has grown to be very beautiful, Sam."

"Master Noel, she is prettier than an angel, and I don't mind tellin' you that I love Madge—"

"Mad Madge, Sam! Has she gone mad?"

"Well, folks calls her Mad Madge because she risks her life so to pilo' vessels into the harborage in storms."

"She always was a bold, fearless girl, and handles a craft with the best of the coast men."

"Sc you love her, Sam?"

"I does, and I'll kill the man that stands between me and her," said Silly Sam with a sudden fierceness that fairly made the young sailor start.

"Has she any lovers, Sam?"

"I don't know, and it's well for 'em I don't; but I think all folks would love her."

"And does she love you, Sam?"

"I hope so, Master Noel, for she is most kind to me always."

"Does she know that you love her?"

"She must, for I look my love, though I don't know how to talk it; but some day I'll get my brain clear and tell her and ask her to be my wife."

"And if she should refuse you, Sam?"

"She won't marry any other man, Master Noel," was the threatening reply.

"You would get rid of him?"

"I would kill him—yes, I would kill her before she should marry any man but me."

Noel Brandon was silent for a few minutes lost in deep thought.

He knew that Silly Sam was as gentle as a kitten, if not aroused; but if his anger or hatred was excited, he was as desperate and dangerous as man could well be.

He had won the silly youth to him in the past by kindly acts; but he saw that Sam would be-

come his deadly foe did he suspect him for an instant of caring for Madge Vernon.

The maiden he had always liked, and though she was the daughter of a poor skipper, commanding a coaster, she had when a little girl won his respect and love.

Twice he had saved her life, and in all his wanderings he had never forgotten the fair face of Madge Vernon, the Queen of the Kennebec, as the rude fishermen had named her.

Returning to his home, bearing the brand of disgrace, after years of absence, she had been the first one to greet him as he sprung ashore, and grown into beautiful budding womanhood, he had found his heart throb fast at the sight of her.

Now he discovered that he was to have a rival in Silly Sam, and one whose own words would prove him dangerous.

"Well, if I am banished from home by my fond parents, I will seek Madge, tell her of my love, and try to make her reform me and become my wife, for with the money I have, I can purchase a schooner and go to privateering in the war that sooner or later must break out between England and the United States.

"But poor Sam! what to do with him is the question."

Thus mused Noel Brandon, as the wagon rolled along the river-road, dropping the village further and further behind it.

Suddenly Silly Sam slacked up for the bridge, and quickly three forms sprung out of the darkness on the roadside.

The reins of the horse were seized by a strong arm, a rifle muzzle was thrust close up to the heart of Noel Brandon, and a pistol covered Silly Sam, while a voice cried sternly:

"Halt! you are my game, and resistance will cause your death!"

CHAPTER III.

MADGE, THE QUEEN OF THE KENNEBEC.

UPON the afternoon that introduces to the reader Noel Brandon, the disgraced naval officer, and his return home, a young girl was standing beneath a large pine that grew upon a cliff overhanging the sandy shore of a cove, or basin, a hundred feet below.

The cliff was a grand point of lookout, commanding as it did a vast expanse of ocean, river and landscape, and the maiden held in her hand a spy-glass with which she had been sweeping the waters and coast for leagues around.

A glance at her is sufficient to recognize Madge Vernon, the beautiful young girl to whom Noel Brandon spoke upon springing ashore from the packet.

Behind her, sheltered by a pine forest, and some hundred yards distant, was a pretty white cabin containing four rooms.

In front, was a small veranda; about the grounds were beds of flowers; a parrot sat upon the back of an easy-chair, and a mocking-bird in a cage was trilling his notes gladly as he gazed out over the lovely scene.

It was a quiet, cosey-looking home without, and within it was even more so, for there was a look of taste approaching refinement resting upon all.

A parlor, prettily furnished, the furniture being mostly from the cabin of some vessel; a kitchen and dining-room combined, and neat as wax; a couple of bedrooms, one containing a hammock instead of a bed, and an adjoining room back, comprised the cottage, the latter being the quarters of an old negress, who was bustling about getting supper, and an aged negro who was busy working in a garden on the hillside.

Everything about the little place indicated that it was the home of a sailor, and as snug in build and weather-worthiness as any seaman could well wish his craft to be.

Turning her glass upon a vessel standing up the coast, Madge Vernon said aloud:

"It is not my father's vessel, but the Kennebec packet, so I will have to go up to the village for stores."

A moment longer she watched the approaching craft, and then walked toward the cottage.

"Jist gwine ter call yer ter supper, Missy Madge," said the negress coming out of the door.

"I am glad it is ready, Phillis, for I do not see my father coming, and our stores are too low to await his return, so I shall run up to the town and get our supplies."

"Yas, missy, and you hab a good wind to go with."

"But you must eat your supper now, for dat fish hain't no good onless you eat him hot," and Phillis pointed to a deliciously broiled fish, which, with some hot biscuit, butter and fragrant coffee were enough to tempt an appetiteless person even.

Madge sat down and enjoyed her supper, and then taking a path that led from the cottage adown the hillside, walked rapidly to the shore of the little cove.

There were several sailing craft there, and half a score of rowboats, but she selected a long surf skiff that spread a large sail, and soon went flying out of the little basin.

As she ran out into the mouth of the river and headed up-stream, she saw the packet not far astern of her, and a desire for a race at once

caused her to trim her sheet, and determine to beat the vessel up to port.

Not once did she appear to watch the packet, though she kept her eyes upon it, and after a close race she had the satisfaction of landing first.

Then it was that she met Noel Vernon, as the reader has seen, and her beautiful face flushed at sight of him.

Leaving the young sailor upon the dock, Madge took her basket and walked on to the village to purchase the supplies she needed for her little household.

While the storekeeper was putting up the groceries for her, she made a visit to an old sailor, living alone in a cabin on the river-bank.

The old man sat before his door, smoking a pipe, and his hair and beard were white as snow; but he rose as Madge approached, and said, in a pleasant way:

"Captain Kyd welcomes you, Miss Madge, for it has been some weeks since I saw your pretty face."

"I have not been up to the village much of late, Captain Kyd; but I hope that you have not been neglected. I have brought you some sea-fish and a few things," and Madge took her basket into the cabin and put the articles named away.

"You are ever kind to the poor old sailor, Miss Madge, and I only wish I could return your kindness; but I am very poor, as you know, and though they say I sailed with Captain Kyd, and call me after him, and gossip has it I know where there is treasure buried, still, but for you and a few other good souls I would starve to death."

"You are very good to me, miss; but is your father at home?"

"No, Captain Kyd; the Blue Bell is off on her voyage yet, though she was due several days ago; but I must be off now, and when father comes, I will run up and bring you some more things."

"Bless you, miss! I only wish I could return your kindness to a poor old sailor; but I cannot!"

"I wish no return for doing my duty toward one who deserves kindness, Captain Kyd," and waving her hand in farewell, Madge walked away from the lonely little spot where the old sailor dwelt alone in his cabin, looked upon by the villagers with a kind of awe, as they knew nothing regarding him, and yet helped by a few of them in his old age.

Years before he had come to the village, and buying the point of land upon which stood his cabin, had there lived the life of a hermit.

Strolling there one day, while waiting for her father, whom she had accompanied to the town, Madge heard groans, and, entering the cabin, found the old man lying prostrate upon the floor, severely wounded by a bullet in his side.

She summoned aid; the old sailor was placed in care of the village doctor and a nurse, and Captain Nick Vernon, the father of Madge, had paid all bills, while the young girl had often carried him edibles when going up to the town.

From some reason, yet just why or how no one knew, the old Hermit Sailor had gained the name of Captain Kyd, and some went so far as to say that he had been a pirate under that noted rover of the seas.

Who had wounded him, or aught concerning his wound, he would not tell, and this but added to the mystery surrounding him.

Certain it was, if he had not been found, as he was, by Madge, he would have died, and this the old sailor realized, for he seemed devoted to the young girl ever since his recovery from his dreadful wound.

Before leaving the cabin of the Hermit Sailor Madge went back to the store, and a half-grown boy helped her to carry her supplies down to the skiff.

As she passed the Flag Ship Tavern she saw Noel Brandon within, drinking deeply and surrounded by a crowd of thirsty villagers.

She sighed, involuntarily, but walked on, put her supplies on board, and soon after was flying down the river before a good breeze.

The moon was just rising as she cast off from the pier, and the youth who carried her purchases said:

"It's going ter be a moonlight night, miss, so you won't be so scared as you would be if it was dark."

"What should I be frightened of?" she asked indifferently.

"They say spooks and spirits is seen at night, miss."

"Well, I do not fear the dead or the living, ghost or goblin," she said with a reckless laugh, as she sped away over the waters, while the youth, having no such courage, and left alone upon the pier turned and fled rapidly back to the village.

Having to beat down the river, Madge, upon one tack stood into a little cove, when suddenly her eyes fell upon a small sloop ahead, and at anchor.

Instantly she held toward it, and as nobody hailed her, ran alongside.

"What does this mean? Her cable is ready to slip, her mainsail set, and she's fixed to run at a moment's notice."

"It looks like mischief, and as there have been some depredations along the river shores of late, I'll see what kind of a crew this craft carries."

So saying, Madge boldly entered the cabin, where a lamp was burning.

Not a man was within it, but upon a table lay a map, or chart, and upon it was considerable writing.

Glancing at it, Madge started with surprise, for that one look told her a secret.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RESCUE.

THE chart upon which Madge gazed was well drawn, and the familiarity of the maiden with the Kennebec river's mouth and adjacent coast, showed her that it was the locality of her home that had been mapped out.

She saw the entrance to the river, and marked in red ink the cove where the little sloop then lay at anchor, with a dot to mark the village above, and a scarlet line to denote the highway along the river-bank.

Then written beneath were the directions which, catching her eye, had caused her to start and to more particularly examine the map:

That which she read was as follows:

"You will follow the Kennebec packet schooner out of port, and crowd on sail to keep as close in her wake as possible, for all depends upon arriving in time.

Reaching the Kennebec you will go into the cove marked by a red line and there drop anchor, leaving sail up, and await my coming, for the highway, where we are to waylay the young officer, is but a cable's length from your anchorage."

"There is, as I expected, mischief brewing through this craft lying at anchor here, and I will see what it means," said the brave girl, and she stood a moment in thought.

Then she went hastily on deck and began to tie the jib halyards into hard knots that could not quickly be undone.

Next she lowered into the water quietly as possible another anchor with a small chain cable that could not be cut, as the rope one then holding the sloop.

"They cannot run off from here without taking some time and trouble," she muttered, as she returned to her boat, and took from a locker a pair of pistols, placing them on the seat by her.

Then lowering her sail she seized a paddle and sent the light skiff shoreward.

The point where she landed was where the crew of the sloop had gone ashore, and their boat was three, the bow pointing out into the cove, and the stern against the bank, merely fastened so as to keep it from drifting away.

Noiselessly Madge took the boat in tow and going along the shore for some little distance made another landing.

Here she fastened the boats, and taking a pistol in either hand, stepped ashore.

Going through the underbrush for a short distance she came to the highway, and here she halted, for, feeling that the men were lying in ambush, and not knowing exactly where, she concluded to stay where she was and await developments.

A few moments of silence, and then she heard a smothered laugh not far distant.

"They are there and waiting, but I can wait, too; but I am fortunate not to have been heard by them, or run upon them."

With the calm courage of an Indian lying in ambush, did Madge remain at her post as the minutes went by.

Then she started, for there came to her ears the rumble of wheels upon the rocky road.

Louder and louder came the sound, and low, stern orders were heard where the men lay in ambush, urging them to be ready to act.

Like a phantom did Madge glide along the roadway, approaching near to the ambushed men, and then she halted in the thick shadow of the overhanging trees.

Nearer and nearer came the wagon, the echo of the hoofs of the horse sending back sharp echoes from the cliffs, and the rumble of the wheels resounding like muffled thunder.

Suddenly the horse stopped, and crisp and stern rung out the words:

"Resist, and you are dead men!"

"Noel Brandon, I want the gold you carry!"

"Ha! this is your game, is it?"

"Take that!"

The reply of the young sailor was followed by the sharp report of a pistol, a cry of pain, curses, and several shots.

Then suddenly there darted upon the scene a shadowy form, a pistol-shot followed, and, as a man bounded into the thicket, a second report rung out as a bullet followed him.

"Oh, Mr. Brandon, you are wounded!" cried Madge, as she bent over the form of the young sailor, who lay by the side of the wagon, the horse having stood perfectly still during the exciting scene.

"Ah! it is you, Madcap Madge, that come so gallantly to my rescue?"

"Yes, I got a shot in my leg as I sprung from the wagon; but poor Silly Sam, I fear, is killed, for one of those fellows fired upon him at arm's length."

"See, please, for he lies in the wagon."

Madge sprung upon the wagon and beheld Silly Sam.

He was lying back on the seat breathing heavily, and evidently hard hit.

"I will aid you into the wagon, Mister Brandon, and you must drive with all haste back to the village, for Silly Sam seems to be badly wounded."

"And those assassins, Madge?"

"One escaped, sir; but I shot the one that held the horse, and—"

"And I killed the other fellow, so let them remain where they are until we send after them from the village; so aid me, please, a little, for my leg is almost useless," and aided by the brave girl the young sailor arose upon one foot and then got into the wagon.

"Mr. Brandon, you are able to drive, so I will remain here until you send back for the bodies of those two men."

"Are you not afraid to remain alone, Miss Madge?"

"No, I fear nothing; but you must hasten, both on your own account and to help poor Silly Sam."

"I shall not delay, and now good-by and Heaven bless you, Madge."

Backing the horse, the young sailor turned his head toward the village and drove off at a rapid pace, for he felt that he needed aid as well as Silly Sam, as his wound pained him greatly.

Standing in the road Madge never moved until the rumble of the wheels were no longer heard, and then she said:

"Now I will get the sloop ready to sail against the coming of the men from the village."

"I am sorry that one of the three escaped, but his vessel is mine, that is certain, and it's just what father needed."

So saying she bent over the prostrate body nearest her.

It was Jenks, and he was dead.

Against the cliff lay Toddy Tom, and placing her hand fearlessly upon his breast, Madge said:

"He is dead too."

A moment after she was in her skiff rowing out to the sloop, the boat of the marauders being in tow.

As she reached the side of the little sloop and sprung on deck, she beheld the head and shoulders of a man appear upon the starboard quarter.

"It was Darke Darrell, and he said fiercely:

"Ho, girl, what do you want here?"

"You!" was the quick retort, and she drew a pistol from her belt.

But Darke Darrell already knew what the maiden was capable of, and he quickly dropped back into the water and dove out of sight.

Madge glanced about for his reappearance for some little time, but not seeing him, she set at work and soon had the sails freed of the knots she had tied in the halyards, and getting up the anchor she stood slowly in-shore, towing the sloop's boat, and her own skiff astern.

As she glided alongside of a rock, near the scene of the attack, she sprung ashore and made the craft fast to a tree, after which she turned to bring the boats ashore.

To her amazement, she saw that the sloop's boat, towing astern of her skiff was gone.

Had it simply become free by the slipping of a painter it would be in sight, she well knew; but not seeing it, she became convinced that the man whom she had driven from the deck, back into the water, had noiselessly and skillfully freed his boat and was then making his escape.

Disappointed, for she disliked to be thwarted in her undertakings, Madge sat upon the deck of the little sloop waiting patiently until the rumble of wheels and fall of hoofs told her that relief was coming from the village at a rapid pace.

Soon after there dashed up to within a few yards of the shore a motley party, consisting of townspeople on horseback, in wagons and chaises, and bearing lanterns.

The leader was a tall, handsome young man, dressed in half sailor garb, half hunter, and Madge recognized in him, Cass Kenedy, the county constable, a daring young fellow who was a terror to river rovers, and whom her father, for some reason, known only to himself, hated most bitterly.

But no matter what cause Captain Vernon had to hate Constable Kenedy, that gallant young man certainly had only the warmest regard for the coast skipper's pretty daughter Madge, and he had looked his love on many occasions, though he had never found the courage to tell her of it, for brave as a lion in danger, he was bashful as a girl before ladies.

"Ah! Mr. Kenedy, I am glad you have come, for I was getting tired waiting; but tell me how Silly Sam is, or if he is dead?" and Madge stepped forward and greeted the constable, nodding coolly to the crowd, as they turned their lanterns upon her.

"How do you do, Miss Madge, and how brave you are to have done what you did to-night, for Lieutenant Brandon has told us all," answered the constable.

"I did only my duty, sir; but how is Sam?"

"He received a bullet wound on his head that stunned him, but will come round all right, while

Lieutenant Brandon will doubtless be laid up for some time with the wound in his leg.

"He sent you this package, Miss Madge, and said you were to keep it until he came for it," and the young constable handed to Madge a large packet, sealed and addressed to her.

What it was she could not guess, and she thrust it into her bosom, while the constable and his followers were engaged in looking at the dead bodies of the two men.

"They are strangers in these parts, and evidently seamen," said Cass Kenedy.

"They came here in that sloop, and to rob Lieutenant Vernon, as I learned on his way home."

"There were three of them, and one escaped; but I have taken possession of their sloop, as I think I am as much entitled to it as any one, though I am ready to give it up if the law so decides," said Madge in a matter-of-fact kind of way.

"It is certainly your prize, Miss Madge, and you are at liberty to keep the craft, after I have searched it, at least until it is decided what to do with it; but I may find some clew of importance on board," and the young constable entered the cabin.

But Madge had already put away the chart, and nothing of importance was found on board, so, after telling what she knew regarding the attack, and of her part in it, she went on board the sloop, Cass Kenedy cast off for her, and she stood slowly out of the cove, her skiff in tow, leaving the party from the village to look after the dead highwaymen.

CHAPTER V.

THE ARMED CUTTER.

IT was the afternoon following the night on which occurred the adventures related in the foregoing chapter, and Madge Vernon was seated in the rustic arbor on the cliff, which her father called the "foretop," looking out over the waters at a distant sail.

"It is not the Blue Bell," she said aloud, as the little vessel changed her course, and headed in-shore.

"It is an armed craft, and one of the cutters of the coast, she looks like," she added, as her well-trained eye recognized that the little vessel was not a peaceful coaster.

Nearer and nearer the schooner drew to the coast, running very slowly, as though afraid of the dangerous locality, and approaching within a league, suddenly luffed up and lay to.

Then a puff of smoke came from her shore bow, and the deep boom of a gun was heard rolling sullenly along landward.

"That gun is the signal for a pilot, so I suppose I must go out to her," muttered Madge, and going up to the cottage, she made some changes in her dress, and descending to the shore, was soon skimming over the waters in her light skiff.

The signal-gun from the cutter had fired several times in the meanwhile, but seeing the skiff shoot out from the cove and head toward it, the firing ceased, and a group of officers on the quarter-deck, and the men in the waist and forecastle watched the coming pilot with interest.

"It is a girl as I live, Maynard," suddenly cried a young officer, wearing the uniform of a lieutenant, and evidently the cutter's commander.

"You are right, Lieutenant Raymond, it is a woman," answered the young officer addressed.

"Not a woman, Lieutenant Maynard, but a very pretty girl, or my glass fools me," remarked a handsome young middy, with a face full of mischief and daring.

"I'll be bound that you will discover her beauty before she is near enough to hardly tell whether she is a fisher girl or Indian squaw, Leo, Lieutenant Maynard remarked with a laugh.

"Yes, Midshipman Leo Lauderdale has an uncommon eye for beauty for one so young," the junior lieutenant, Ray Raymond said.

The three officers were young, dashing looking fellows, wearing the uniform of the United States navy, and their vessel showed thorough discipline on board, which proved that they did not neglect in any respect the duties devolving upon them.

While they conversed together the skiff came flying toward the cutter, held on her course over the waters by the small, shapely but nut-brown hand of Madge Vernon.

As she drew near enough to be distinctly seen, Lieutenant Maynard said:

"Leo, egad, you were right, for the girl is a beauty; but it is a pilot we want now, for I hoped to have reached Brandon Hall to-night."

"She may go after a pilot for us, sir," responded Ray Raymond.

"It is what I will ask her to do; but what brings her out to us, I wonder, and does she not handle that skiff well?"

"Ho, the cutter!" came in a clear, musical voice across the waters.

"Ahoy the skiff!" answered Maynard.

"You signaled for a pilot, I believe?"

"Yes, can you send us one?"

"I will act as your pilot."

"You!" and there was great surprise in the way the one word was uttered.

"Yes, I know these waters well," was the modest response of Madge.

"You are but a girl."

"Still I am a pilot and am called the Girl Pilot of the Kennebec."

"I will trust you, miss, so please come on board."

In a moment more Madge stood upon the quarter-deck of the cutter.

The three officers gallantly saluted her, as did several others, young middies standing in the waist, and Mayo Maynard saw before him a face that was beautiful in the extreme, yet wearing a certain look of recklessness seldom seen on feminine features.

He beheld a form perfect in its outline, finely knit, and saw that her every movement was one of natural grace, and not studied.

She was dressed in a jaunty suit, a tarpaulin, with fluttering ribbon-ends sheltered her head, held in haughty, self-conscious poise, and her tiny feet were incased in well-fitting boots.

There was that in the appearance of Madge to command respect, and admiration as well, and Mayo Maynard said politely:

"I am glad to welcome you, miss, on board the United States schooner Scorpion.

"My name is Mayo Maynard, and I am in need of a pilot to run me into a harbor as near Brandon Hall as possible."

Madge bowed and slightly changed color at the mention of Brandon Hall.

She had heard, just before leaving the village the evening before, why Noel Brandon had returned home, and she wondered if the cutter's appearance on the coast had aught to do with his return.

"I can run you to a safe harbor, sir, a league from Brandon Hall, and perhaps some farmer can drive you thither by the roadway, for the coast near the place is very dangerous and you would not dare lay at anchor there, as storms are frequent here."

"That will suffice, miss, so I will ask you to pilot us to the harbor you speak of as soon as possible, for I have a most disagreeable duty to perform, and I wish it well over with; but you have not told me your name?"

"My name is Madge Vernon," was the simple reply and the young girl stepped to the wheel.

The cutter was at once gotten under way, the skiff was towed astern, and the Scorpion held landward under the skillful guidance of Madge Vernon.

"Are you acquainted at Brandon Hall, miss?" asked Mayo Maynard as he stood near the girl, admiring her skillful handling of the schooner.

"I know the Brandons, and they know me; but they are rich aristocrats and I am but a poor girl, the daughter of an humble coast skipper," and there was bitterness in the tone and words.

"Could you tell me if Lieutenant Noel Brandon has returned home?"

"Yes, he arrived yesterday by the Boston and Kennebec packet."

"Ah! I am glad to know this, for we can return at once to Boston; but may I ask if you know why Lieutenant Brandon returned home?"

"It was gossiped about that he had killed his captain in a duel."

"Would that were all, for the honor of our service; but it was not his captain, but a lieutenant, a superior officer, and he had severe provocation, I have heard, and I only wish he had done no worse than resent the insult of a senior."

"Has he done worse?" asked Madge, in a low tone.

"Yes, and it is his last act that brings us here after him."

"He was dismissed the service for the killing of his superior in a duel, but having hard feelings toward his captain, who urged his disgrace, he killed him, too."

"How fearful that he should have done so," Madge said, with a shudder.

"He has cut short his career by the act, and, I do not mind telling you, miss, as it is now known, that he assassinated his captain at the hotel where he was stopping in New York, going to his room in the dead of night, killing him and, it is supposed, robbing him of a large sum of money which the captain was known to have in his possession."

"This is terrible news, sir; but it is not like Noel Brandon as I know him."

"No; but he is guilty, for his belt of arms was found in the captain's room, and also his cloak, while he was registered at the inn, and was known to have taken the stage at midnight from New York to Boston."

"And you have come here to arrest him for murder?" asked Madge, quietly.

"Yes, miss, and he will swing for his crime as surely as his name is Brandon."

"It is a most unpleasant duty for me, as I sailed with Brandon once and liked him greatly, while I have met his father; but I must do my duty, and when you run us to an anchor I will have to go to Brandon Hall and obey orders."

"It must be an unpleasant duty, sir; but I expect you will have to wait until the morning

to go to the Hall, for it will be late when we arrive at an anchorage, and by the road you have to travel you would not reach there until midnight."

"It is not sunset for half an hour, miss, and I should think we might reach the harbor, which you pointed out awhile since."

"These waters are most dangerous, sir, and the channels we have to follow make the distance long."

"You know best, my fair pilot, and I suppose Brandon will not escape, as he doubtless does not believe he is suspected, so we will have to bide our time until to-morrow."

Madge made no reply, and held on her course; but so many turns did she make, that the crew remarked among themselves that the channel was the most tortuous one they had ever seen.

Night came on while they were yet a league from the harbor, and then Madge ordered sail shortened, and the cutter crept slowly on her course.

At last the harbor was reached, but it was ten o'clock, and before a landing could be made, and three miles traversed to Brandon Hall, it would be after midnight, and Mayo Maynard said he would wait until the morning to carry out his unpleasant duty.

In an embarrassed way he asked Madge the amount of her pilot fee, and she said coldly:

"When I have run you out to sea to-morrow, I will tell you my price."

"Ah! then you will let me offer you the hospitality of my vessel for the night?"

"Thank you, no, for my home is not far distant, and there are those who would be anxious regarding me," and with a slight bow she walked to the side, entered her skiff, and went flying over the moonlit waters in the direction of her home, which was distant a league from where the cutter lay at anchor.

Having run in under the shadow of the land, she suddenly changed her course and headed back up the coast, seemingly anxious to keep out of the range of curious eyes upon the cutter's decks.

A sail of half an hour brought her to a small cove, and there she ran her skiff ashore.

A fisher hut stood not far distant, and a light burned in the window; but she avoided the little domicile, and at a rapid walk plunged into the depths of a heavy pine forest, seemingly holding no fear of the gloomy surroundings.

Soon she came to a small clearing, and in it was a small graveyard, a score or more of white head-boards looking ghastly in the shadows of night.

But without a tremor of fear Madge walked by the desolate resting-place of the dead, and continuing her rapid walk, after a couple of miles had been passed over, she came out upon a scene of civilization, for a large, well-cultivated farm was before her gaze.

Upon a hill in the distance the white walls of a large mansion glimmered in the moonlight, and lights were visible in the windows.

Approaching the house, Madge ascended the steps of the piazza, when suddenly a form advanced toward her.

It was a young girl, who had been seated alone upon the piazza, and with surprise had observed the rapid approach of Madge, wondering what brought her at that late hour to Brandon Hall.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TWO MAIDENS.

THE home that Madcap Madge had visited late at night was Brandon Hall, the residence of the aristocratic, proud family whose name the place bore.

It was a large, rambling, luxurious-looking abode, furnished with every luxury that could be purchased in those primitive days, and surrounded by thousands of acres that brought in a liberal revenue to the owner.

At Brandon Hall dwelt Doctor David Brandon and his wife and daughter Joyce, the latter a beautiful girl of eighteen, while his son, the reckless young sailor whom the reader has already met, and the pride of his parents and sister, was an officer in the United States navy.

The one who advanced to meet Madge, as she ascended the steps, was Joyce Brandon, and lured by the beauty of the night she had remained upon the piazza alone, her parents having retired some time before.

She recognized by the moonlight the daring girl who had won the *sobriquet* of Madcap Madge, and wondered at her visit to Brandon Hall, especially at that late hour.

She knew Madge well by sight, had admired her beautiful face and superb form, but stood a little in awe of her wayward and daring life.

She therefore advanced toward her somewhat coldly and bowed, while she said:

"You are Miss Vernon, I believe?"

"Yes, Miss Brandon, and I am fortunate in finding you alone, for I came to see you."

"To see me?" asked Joyce, in surprise.

"Yes, and I have little time to accomplish what I will, so will make known the errand that brings a poor skipper's daughter to Brandon Hall," and Madge spoke with some bitterness of tone.

"I am ready to know your errand, Miss Vernon, so pray be seated."

"There are no curious ears near?"

"None; say what you would?"

"Are you expecting your brother home?"

"Not for a year, perhaps longer," was the cold reply, for Joyce remembered that her brother Noel had always held a soft spot in his heart for Madge.

"Then you are unaware that he has returned?"

"My brother here?" and Joyce seemed excited at the tidings.

"Yes, but pray be calm, for I have that to tell you that will give pain."

"Heaven have mercy! has aught befallen my brother?"

"Speak! is he dead?"

"Oh no, Miss Brandon; but I will tell you all," and Madge told of her race up the river with the packet schooner, her meeting with Noel Brandon, what he had told her, what she had heard in the way of gossip, and then of the discovery she had made, the ambush and return of Noel to the village inn.

"Ah! but this is fearful, Miss Vernon, for my father is so proud of his good name, that, though he loves my brother with all his heart, I fear he will utterly cast him off; but you say that he is not dangerously wounded?"

"No, he is painfully hurt, but not seriously, so Cass Kennedy the constable told me; but I have not told you the worst, Miss Brandon, and, after what you tell me of your father, I fear that what is done to save Lieutenant Brandon we must do."

"How do you mean?" asked Joyce in a pained way.

"I mean that this afternoon an armed vessel, the United States cutter Scorpion, fired for a pilot off the coast, and I went out to run the vessel into harbor."

"You are a most daring girl, Miss Vernon."

"No, for there was no danger in what I did: but it is not of myself that I would speak, but of your brother."

"I discovered that the commander, Lieutenant Mayo Maynard—"

"An old shipmate of my brother."

"Yes, but at present under orders to arrest him, and bear him to Boston."

"But you said that he had been dismissed from the navy for the killing of his superior officer."

"True, but there is another charge, and a worse one against him."

"Heaven have mercy! but tell me all I beg you."

"It seems that his captain also persecuted him on board ship, as well as the senior lieutenant, whom your brother killed in the duel, and his commander was instrumental in having him dismissed in disgrace."

"When in port the captain stopped at a hotel, and he was found dead in his room, evidently murdered, and robbed of a large sum of money he was known to have had in his possession."

"Your brother was known to be in the city, at the hotel, and, though I cannot believe that he was guilty of a murder, and a robbery, still his belt of arms and cloak were found in the captain's room, and there was blood upon them, and evidence of a severe struggle."

"My poor, poor, brother!" groaned Joyce, her head bowed in commingled grief and despair.

"Now, Miss Brandon, Lieutenant Maynard has come here to arrest your brother and bear him back to Boston or New York, and he will be speedily tried and hanged for this murder, whether he is guilty or not."

"To prevent his arrest, I kept the cutter running up and down the channels, and urged the lieutenant to await until morning to come to Brandon Hall."

"Then I took my skiff and came here to see you."

"But what is to be done, my noble girl?"

"Save him!"

"If he is guilty of a crime so base, he should meet his fate, be it what it may," haughtily said Joyce.

"But the disgrace falls upon your proud head too, young lady, and I do not believe he is guilty, for wild though he may be, killing his superior officer as he did in a duel, he is yet no cowardly murderer and thief."

"God bless you for those words," murmured Joyce.

"In the heat of the moment he will be tried and hung up to the yard-arm, while free, he will be able to prove his innocence, and so I have come to you to save him."

"But I am powerless to do aught."

"Your father would not give him protection?"

"Never!"

"And your mother?"

"She would not have the courage to do so."

"And you?"

"I would give my life to save him, but I know not what to do."

"There is no place here in which he could hide."

"No."

"Then I must save him."

"You?"

"Yes; for I can do so, and will, for I owe to him my life."

"I came first to you, Miss Brandon, but as I see that you are powerless, I will act."

"But how can you save him?"

"I will devise some way," and Madge arose to depart.

"Noel is now at the Flag Ship Inn, you say?"

"Yes."

"Wounded?"

"Yes."

"It is now after eleven o'clock."

"It is nearly midnight."

"And the village is miles away!"

"True, but it can be reached in an hour's time by hard riding."

"I will go with you, and Sam, the stableman, I can trust, for he idolizes my brother."

"No, it would excite suspicion, did any one see you on the road, or in the village, so I will go, for I can cross the point of land to Fisher Frank's cottage, take one of his skiffs, run up to the village, and get your brother away from the inn."

"What courage you have; but where would you take him?"

"I do not know; but anywhere away from the inn so he will not be found there to-morrow."

"But he is wounded."

"That must not prevent his escape; but now I must be off."

"I will walk with you to the fisherman's cot, for it is but a mile, and I am too excited to be afraid."

"Come, we will talk over some plan as we go," and as silently as specters the two maidens stole away from the mansion, and crossing the ornamental grounds, disappeared in the heavy pine forest beyond.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

IN one of the pleasantest rooms, on the ground floor of the Flag Ship Inn, lay Noel Brandon upon a cot, which had been placed there for him by his attentive host.

The bullet had been extracted from his leg, the wound dressed, and Captain Buntline the landlord had offered to sit up with his guest, who had ever been a generous patron of the inn.

But Noel Brandon had preferred to be alone, and midnight found him lying upon his cot, his eyes wide open and his brain busy.

The sounds in the village had died away, the lights one by one had been put out, and all was darkness and silence about the inn.

Silly Sam, not severely wounded as had been feared at first, had recovered rapidly and had gone to his humble home, after being refused permission to remain as a nurse to Noel Brandon.

He had been stunned by the bullet, but it had proven to be but a scalp wound, and Silly Sam made light of it.

At length, perhaps from bitter thoughts that forced themselves upon him, when alone with his conscience, Noel Brandon grew restless and he tossed and turned in his cot.

Suddenly his eyes fell upon a face at the window.

The room was in a wing of the inn, that projected into a flower garden, and the windows looked out upon a small porch.

It was here that the face appeared.

Noel Brandon was a man of iron nerve; but he started in spite of himself as he beheld that face, and he glared upon it, as though he saw an apparition.

Then he saw a finger rise to the lips, as though to warn him to silence, and next the sash was slowly and noiselessly raised from without, and the midnight visitor entered the room.

"Madge Vernon, you here?" cried the young sailor, in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes, and you must go with me."

"Why, Madge—"

"You must come, and at once, and I will explain as we go."

"But I cannot walk, Madge."

"I have made you a pair of crutches of oars—see!"

She drew into the window as she spoke, two oars, the handles of which had been sawed off to the right height, and over the blade ends had been tied canvas to make them comfortable for the arms.

"But Madge, what does all this mean that I should steal away in the night?"

"Do you wish to swing at the yard-arm, Noel Brandon?"

"God forbid! but I have been dismissed in punishment for my killing—"

"You are accused of a far worse crime."

"If!"

"Yes."

"But I am falsely accused, Madge."

"Then come with me, and free you can prove it; but in irons in a vessel's hold you cannot."

"Ha! there is some deep mystery in all this."

"Solve it by going with me."

"And whither?"

"Come and see."

"Not to Brandon Hall?"

"No, for your father would not receive you."

"Go, Madge, for I follow, and Heaven bless you," he said, sadly, as he rose from the cot.

She left the room and awaited him out upon the porch.

Dressing as rapidly as he could, and taking his weapons, he left the room by way of the window, cautiously descended to the garden, and led by Madge came to the little gate that opened upon a small pier where the boats were kept.

He walked slowly and painfully, for he was unused to crutches, but at last he was seated in a small skiff, and seizing the oars Madge sent it flying over the waters.

She held close in-shore, and at last landed upon a wooded point.

It was the desolate spot whereon stood the humble cabin of the mysterious old Sailor Hermit whom the villagers called Captain Kyd.

A dim light burned within the cabin, for the old hermit seemed never to love darkness, and springing ashore, while she bade Noel Brandon remain in the skiff, Madge ran up to the hut and knocked.

"Well?" came the voice of the hermit in response, and in a way that seemed to indicate that he was wide awake.

"It is Madcap Madge, Captain Kyd; open your door quickly," she said.

A moment after the door swung open, and the old hermit, fully dressed, stood before her, while he said:

"Has aught gone wrong with your father, Miss Madge?"

"No, Captain Kyd; but I have come to ask a favor of you."

"You have but to speak to have me grant it."

"I have a friend who is accused of a foul crime."

"In irons he cannot prove his innocence, but free he may do so, and they seek to hang him at the yard-arm."

"If taken his life must soon end, and he is wounded and in distress, so I have come to ask you to give him shelter for a short while, until he is able to take care of himself?"

"Willingly, young lady; but who is he?"

"Noel Brandon."

"A Brandon accused of crime, and a fugitive from the yard-arm," said the old sailor in surprise.

"Yes."

"You say he is with you?"

"Yes, in the skiff along shore."

"Let him come here."

"I thank you, sir; but remember, not even my father must know of this."

"No one will ever know through me, Madge."

"Again I thank you," and Madge returned to the skiff and said:

"You are to seek shelter with the Hermit Sailor, Lieutenant Brandon, until you are able to make your escape from this dangerous locality."

"Madge Vernon, I owe you more than life; but there is no time to speak of it, or to thank you."

"I knew the old Hermit Sailor years ago, but you must indeed have won his heart to cause him to give me shelter in his cabin."

"He will give you shelter and protect you, so that you will be safe; but let me give you the package I received from Constable Kenedy."

"No, keep it for me until I come for it, and Madge, have Captain Buntline, of the Flag Ship, look after my traps for me, if you can ask him to do so without exciting suspicion."

"Write him word to do so, and let the hermit post the letter."

"Now you must hasten," and she aided him up the hillside.

"Lieutenant Brandon, you are welcome to a refuge in my humble cabin, for Miss Madge so asks it, and I can refuse her nothing."

There was that in the words that told the young sailor that he was welcome only through Madge; but he said:

"I thank you, Captain Kyd, for your kindness to one who is under a cloud just now, and some day I hope to prove my appreciation."

"I ask for no return, sir—but come in, for I have a bunk for you, and as you are wounded, I will be your nurse, for I am something of a physician—come, Miss Madge."

But Madge had quietly stolen away, and was already in her skiff, running rapidly down the river.

Past the sleeping village she went, and hoisting her sail she glided swiftly away for nearly an hour.

Then she ran into a small cove, and as she touched the shore a form came forward to meet her.

"Well?"

"He is safe, Miss Brandon."

"Where?"

"It matters not, but he is safe, and you had better hasten home, for within an hour it will be dawn," and having made the skiff fast, so that Fisher Frank, who lived in his cabin not far away, would not suspect it having been used, Madge led the way through the dark forest.

At a certain point the path divided, and Madge said:

"That is your way, Miss Brandon, and this mine."

"I will soon go over this two miles to the Hall, and I sincerely hope my absence has not been discovered; but you?"

"I shall go home, and have Philip row me up to where I left my skiff, and in it I will go out to the cutter and pilot a boat to the landing at Brandon Hall."

"Thank God they will not find my poor brother."

"No, they will have come on a fruitless errand."

"And he owes his life to you, and I a lasting friendship," and Joyce extended both of her hands.

"I am glad to have saved your brother, and I appreciate your friendship, Miss Brandon, such as it can be between you and me."

"Good night," and Madge walked rapidly homeward, while Joyce Brandon, left alone, hastened toward Brandon Hall as fast as her tired feet would bear her.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MYSTERY.

TRUE to her promise made to Lieutenant Maynard, Madge Vernon visited the cutter the following morning.

After parting from Joyce Brandon in the forest, she had rapidly walked home, thrown herself upon the bed for an hour's rest, after having told Phyllis to call her and have breakfast ready at sunrise, and Philip to be prepared to go with her up the coast.

Springing to her feet when called by Phyllis, and making a neat and hasty toilet; the young girl ate her breakfast, and went down to the shore, whither old Philip had preceded her.

Springing into the skiff that he had in waiting, she said:

"Pull hard, Philip, up the coast."

"Yas, missy: but whar am your skiff?"

"It is there that I am going, where I left it last night."

"You walk home then, missy?"

"Yes."

"It very late when you come in, missy."

"No, Philip, it was very early," answered Madge, with a mental reservation, regarding the early morning hour at which she had returned home.

"Phyllis and me thought you would stay on the cutter."

"No, Philip, I would not do that."

"What was the matter, missy, about your running in, for you kept her backin' and fillin' for awful long time, and we thought you had forgot the channel?"

"No, I knew the channel well enough, but I did not wish to drop anchor until some time after dark; but mind you, Philip, if any one should come to the cottage and ask about me, you might say I came home early, and left my skiff up the coast as I had a head wind, and could walk back quicker than I could row or sail."

"So you could, missy," and soon after the boat glided into the little cove where Madge had left her surf-skiff.

Springing on board the maiden set sail, and waving her hand to Philip, who started upon his return, she glided out of the cove toward the cutter, which lay half a league distant.

"All ready for you, my fair pilot, for I believe you said you would guide us to Brandon Hall," said Mayo Maynard, advancing to the gangway to meet her.

"Yes, sir, I will guide you there," was the answer, and a boat containing Lieutenant Maynard, Midshipman Lauderdale and half a score of sailors left the vessel's side and followed in the wake of the surf-skiff.

Running in among the inlets and caves, Madge piloted the boat to a small haven, from whence in the distance, could be seen the handsome mansion of Brandon Hall.

She pointed out the house, and the road leading to it, and said:

"That is Brandon Hall, sir, and I will await here to pilot you out to sea again."

"You will not accompany us to the mansion then?"

"No, sir; for as a poor skipper's daughter, I am not on visiting terms with the aristocratic Brandons," was the response, in a tone that seemed bitter.

"I will not ask it, then, and as my business is of a painful nature, I will not keep you waiting very long."

"Come, lads!" and Lieutenant Maynard led the way up the path leading to the house.

As he approached the mansion he could not but admire its solidity and grandeur, and was lost in admiration at the beauty of the surrounding scenery, with flower-gardens, lawns and parks encircling the abode, and here and there rustic arbors and little retreats inviting to repose.

Upon the piazza he beheld an elderly gentleman smoking and watching his approach, while a young girl was pacing to and fro.

"There is Brandon's father—yes, and his sister, too; but I do not see him, Leo, and I assure you I shrink from this painful duty," said the kind-hearted Maynard, addressing Midshipman Lauderdale, as they drew near the mansion.

Halting his men in the grand drive before the steps, Lieutenant Maynard ascended to the piazza and Doctor Brandon advanced to meet him.

He was a man across the threshold of fifty, tall, dignified and stern-looking; but his manners were courteous, though cold in bearing.

"As an officer of the navy, sir, you are welcome—ah! I recognize you now as Lieutenant Maynard, a friend of my son. You are indeed welcome, sir," and Doctor Brandon grasped the hand of the handsome young lieutenant, who bowed and presented Midshipman Lauderdale, hardly knowing what to say, as the sad duty he had to perform fell hard upon him.

The doctor then introduced the officers to Joyce, who was very pale, but calm, for she but too well knew why they had come.

"I have come, Doctor Brandon, to see your son; is he here?"

"Why, bless me, no! He is off on a cruise somewhere."

"He has not returned home, then?"

"No, sir; nor do I expect him for some time, from his last letter."

"Doctor Brandon, you have not then heard of a sad affair that happened on his vessel when at Norfolk, six weeks ago?"

"I have not, sir; but, tell me, has harm befallen my brave boy?"

"It is my misfortune, sir, to tell you that your son forced a superior officer, the senior lieutenant of his ship, to fight him a duel, and it was fatal to his antagonist."

"Great God! if Noel has done this, he has had just cause, much as it is to be deplored," cried the doctor, turning pale.

"It was admitted, sir, that Mr. Brandon was persecuted bitterly by his superiors, for his captain sided with the senior officer, but that did not excuse his act, and he was quickly tried and dismissed from the navy."

"Heavens! disgraced! my son utterly disgraced, then indeed has he erred."

"I would, sir, that this was all, and that the affair, sad as it is, rested there; but I have come here, sir, to arrest Mr. Brandon on a charge far more criminal, for, after leaving his ship at New York, he went to the hotel where his captain stopped, and that night left for his home by the midnight stage, while the following morning Captain Marsden was found dead in his bed, robbed of a large sum of money, and your son's cloak and weapons in the room and blood-stained."

"These pointed to him as the murderer, especially after the part Captain Marsden had taken against him, and I was dispatched in the Scorpion to arrest Mr. Brandon and carry him back to New York in irons."

Doctor Brandon was a strong man, and he clutched the piazza rail as he listened to the terrible story, and stood like a statue, uttering no word, but with a face like marble, while Joyce dropped into a seat and buried her face in her hands.

"It cuts me to the heart to bring this news to you, Doctor Brandon; but I can but do my duty," said Lieutenant Maynard, as the doctor still remained silent.

"I do not censure you, sir," he said with an effort, and then continued:

"Appearances are certainly black against my son; but I cannot believe him guilty of murder and robbery."

"He was wild, yes, and extravagant, but not a robber and an assassin; but until he clears up this mystery, he is no son of mine, and were he here in my home, this instant would I deliver him up to you for trial."

"Then he really is not here?"

"He is not, sir; well, Mandrake, what is it?" and Doctor Brandon turned to a servant who just then appeared.

"A letter, sir, sent over from the village in great haste," said the servant.

"Noel's writing!" cried Doctor Brandon excitedly, and he hastily broke the seal and glanced at the contents.

"I will read aloud what he says, sir," and Doctor Brandon read the letter, Joyce eagerly bending forward to hear its contents.

It ran as follows:

"FATHER:—I have to make known to you that my career of usefulness as an officer of the navy is ended, for, goaded on by insult from my superior officer, I forced him to give me satisfaction, and he fell under my fire in a duel."

"I was still hounded by my captain, and the result was my dismissal in disgrace from the navy."

"I started home, and arriving in the packet from Boston, left in a wagon, driven by Silly Sam of this village, to drive to the Hall; but we were ambushed by river rovers, fired upon, and Sam and myself are both wounded, while we owe our escape to Madcap Madge, the Kennebec Maid, who, passing near, came to our rescue."

"I returned to the village, and am under the doctor's care, my wound being severe, though not serious."

"I know not whether you and my mother care to welcome a disgraced son home; but if you do, I shall be glad to come when I am able to do so, or to see you here; but if not, leave my letter unanswered, and I will endeavor to atone in your eyes by making a reputation for myself that you will be proud of."

"Awaiting,

"Your affectionate son,

"NOEL BRANDON."

"This letter, sir, shows that he was driven to the duel, but it says nothing of the fearful after charge you make against him."

"No, Doctor Brandon; he would hardly speak of that, and—"

"The post has come, sir," and Mandrake placed in his master's hands the little mail-bag sent over once a week from the village.

With a hand that trembled, Doctor Brandon opened it, and his eyes fell upon a letter in the handwriting of his son.

Hastily he broke the seal and read aloud:

"FATHER:—After mailing my letter to you last night, I was horrified to learn that I am accused of a most diabolical crime—none other than having murdered and robbed my former captain at his hotel!"

"I am guiltless of the crime, but if I am taken in irons in the cutter sent for me, I will be tried and sentenced to the yard-arm, with no power to prove that I am not guilty."

"Free, I can prove my innocence—and I will; and not caring to be hanged, I make my escape to-night, and place myself beyond the clutches of the merciless law."

"Until I can prove that I am guiltless, you need not expect again to hear of your

"Unfortunate son,

"NOEL BRANDON."

"In Heaven's name, how did he learn of my coming?" cried Lieutenant Maynard, when the doctor had finished reading the letter.

"I am sure I do not know, sir; but I cannot believe him guilty, and am glad that he has escaped, if by so doing he can prove his innocence; but if he is guilty, then may he suffer the full penalty of his crime," was the stern rejoinder.

"It is several leagues to the village, sir?" suddenly asked Lieutenant Maynard.

"It is, sir."

"With this breeze, I could reach there almost as soon by returning to the cutter and running around?"

"You could, sir; but if you desire conveyances thither, I will furnish you with them."

"Thank you, no, Doctor Brandon, I would not ask you to raise hand to aid in the capture of your son, for I go to the village to endeavor to find him."

"This has been a painful mission to me, sir, and for the sake of all, as well as the service, I hope Mr. Brandon can clear himself of the charge against him."

"Good-morning," and Lieutenant Maynard raised his cap, as he turned toward Joyce.

"Hey, gentlemen, have you breakfasted?" asked the doctor with cold courtesy.

"Yes, thank you, sir, before we left the vessel."

The doctor bowed, and the sailors marched away, while Doctor Brandon said sadly:

"Now to go and tell my wife of what our poor boy is accused."

Like one in a dream he entered the house, and Joyce remained upon the piazza, a triumphant smile upon her lips, as she glanced through a sea-glass and saw Madge pacing up and down upon the shore where the boats were drawn up.

"That strange girl saved him last night, and she will not allow him to be taken now; but I can reach the village on horseback long before the cutter, and I will ride over to see if there is any trace left of Noel's whereabouts, for I do not believe him guilty, and he must not be taken."

Ten minutes after, mounted upon a spirited horse, and followed by a servant, Joyce Brandon was dashing along the highway at a rapid pace, on her way to the village, while her parents, in deepest grief mourned over the degradation that had come upon them through their idolized son.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SEARCH.

WHEN Joyce Brandon rode into the little village, followed by a servant, their horses were white with foam.

She went directly to the Flag Ship Inn, and Captain Buntline gallantly aided her to alight, while her servant led the horses back to the stable.

"You have come to see your brother, Miss Joyce?" said Captain Buntline, who knew the maiden well, for often in her rides and drives, alone and with her parents and brother, she had stopped at the Flag Ship to rest.

"Yes, Captain Buntline, I have come to see him," was the reply.

"I am sorry to say he is not here, miss."

"Not here? Then where is he?" asked Joyce, in well-feigned surprise.

The host shrugged his shoulders and answered:

"He occupied that little parlor last night, for I had a cot put up there for him and made him as comfortable as I could under the circumstances, for he was suffering from his wound; but this morning I dropped in and found him gone, to my great surprise."

"It is mail-day, Miss Joyce, and I took from the post this letter, which you are at liberty to read, for it tells me simply that he learns that he is to be arrested for a crime he did not commit, and not caring to dance a jig at the end of

a rope, he takes himself off to safe quarters, and wishes me to keep his baggage until he calls for it."

"This I will do."

Joyce read the letter through, and then said: "This is a surprise, sir; but I am aware of the charge against my brother, and am glad that he has escaped; but can you not tell me how he did so?"

"It is the deepest mystery to me, Miss Brandon, for he was wounded, his leg was bandaged, and he could not walk."

"He did not leave the inn by the front or back doors, for they were locked; but that window was up, and I feel that he departed by the garden and then took a boat."

"Then you think he has made his escape, sure?"

"I am certain of it, for those who aided him did not intend that he should be captured."

"He had aid, then?"

"Assuredly, for he could not go alone, wounded as he was; and besides, he did not take any of my boats."

"Well, Captain Buntline, in an hour or so, the United States cutter-of-war, Scorpion, will anchor off the village, and her officers have come after my brother, and if you can aid in covering up his tracks, do so, for he must not be taken, as he is, I am sure, not guilty as charged."

"You may need some gold to aid you, so here is my purse, and if more is required, in some way send me word, and you shall have it."

"I came here to see if it were possible to find my brother, but I am confident that you do not know where he is, and that he is well hidden; but, in case you can keep the enemy off his track, do so, and call upon me for what money you may need."

"I will do so, Miss Brandon, rest assured, and if I have to spend gold, it will be then time to ask it back from you: but keep your purse, and believe that I will throw the law hounds off his track if I can, for the leftenant has always been a good friend and patron of mine, and I do not believe he would do aught that was mean and wicked—See! there comes the cutter now," and the landlord pointed out of the window to the little vessel, crowding on all sail in her run up to the village.

"Are you sure none of the villagers know where my brother is?" asked Joyce, feeling her way.

"Not one of them, for I have been the rounds."

"I thought Silly Sam must know, but he was so surprised at hearing that the leftenant had gone, that I knew it was not feigned, while the poor fellow was wounded, and kept his bed all night, so Saunders the cartman says."

Joyce felt relieved, for she knew that Madge had worked well and secretly, and as she had not even told her where Noel was in hiding, she felt certain she would not trust the secret to others.

Standing in the window, Joyce watched the cutter run in to an anchorage, and then, with the glass which Captain Buntline had bought her, beheld Madcap Madge come over the side into the boat that put ashore.

"Captain Buntline, I see the girl in that boat who is known as Madge, the Kennebec Maid, and I wish to speak with her in my room, so please send her here."

"I will do so, Miss Joyce; but what a remarkable girl she is!"

"She is indeed, and there seems some mystery overhanging her that no one can fathom."

"No one knows aught about her father, miss, other than that he is the skipper of a coaster, which those who do not like him say is a smuggler."

"He came to the coast years ago, some say from the South, as he brought two negroes with him, and there he lives."

"He is an educated man, and has taught his daughter more learning than she could get in schools hereabout, while she knows how to handle any craft, and can pilot a line-o'-battle ship along this coast in any weather and the darkest night."

"You see the cutter has her for a pilot; but who she is, or more about her, I cannot discover, though I gave the negro, Philip, a gold eagle once to tell me what he knew, and when he got through I found out nothing that I did not already know about them."

"They are a strange four, Miss Brandon; but I'll tell the girl to come to you soon, and I see her coming up the street now."

As the landlord entered his tap-room, Lieutenant Maynard and Midshipman Lauderdale came into the inn, and the former called the host aside and held an earnest conversation with him.

Captain Buntline explained that he had had the young sailor as his guest, and then told of his mysterious disappearance, after which he knew no more.

Lieutenant Maynard then spread his men through the village and began a thorough search of the place and its surroundings, while he went through the inn.

"This room is occupied by a lady, sir," said the host, as they came to the chamber in which was Joyce Brandon.

"I regret the work I am forced to do, sir; but

I must enter the room, so pray knock and tell the lady so," was the reply.

The landlord did so, and in response came a firm:

"Come in!"

"Ah! Miss Brandon!" cried Lieutenant Maynard, in surprise, as he beheld Joyce standing at the window, arrayed in her riding-habit.

"Yes, Lieutenant Maynard, I arrived here before you," was the calm reply.

"And you warned your brother, then, so that he could escape?"

"But I cannot blame you."

"No I did nothing of the kind, though I did come here to serve him if need be; he made his escape last night, as Captain Buntline informs me."

"He cannot be far away, Miss Brandon, and it is my duty to try and find him."

"Do your duty then, Lieutenant Maynard, but be assured that I, believing my brother innocent of the fearful crime charged upon him, shall save him if I can, from a trial that can only end in his conviction and an ignominious death."

"You would but do your duty, Miss Brandon, and I honor you for it; but I must do mine, as well, bitter as it is to me, and you will therefore pardon me for making thorough search of your room."

"Certainly, sir," was the cold response, and with a flush of shame, Mayo Maynard gave the order to his men to search the room.

The closets were thrown open and every chink and cranny examined, but the fugitive was not found, and with a bow of apology to Joyce, the officer left to search elsewhere.

He had left the room but a short while when there came a light tap upon the door, and in response to an invitation to do so, in walked Madcap Madge.

She bowed to Joyce, who at once came forward and grasped her hand.

"You wished to see me, Miss Brandon?"

"Yes, for I feared my brother might be found, so I came here to see if I could warn him."

"He will not be found, Miss Brandon, for he well knows the consequences."

"Where is he?"

"That I must decline to tell you."

"You surely do not think that I—"

"I think nothing, I only know that his hiding place is secure and it is my secret."

"Although inclined to resent your words, I yet feel the more assured by them that my brother is securely hidden."

"You may be assured of that, and return home in peace of mind as regards his safety."

"I shall not return home until the cutter leaves her anchorage."

"She will doubtless sail when her commander discovers his search is fruitless."

"And you will pilot her out to sea?"

"Yes."

"Your services are valuable as a pilot, Miss Vernon, and more so as a protector to my brother, so permit me to pay in part the pecuniary indebtedness he is under to you, for words cannot show my gratitude."

Madge wheeled with flashing eyes upon Joyce Brandon, who knew not the sting of her words, and spoken with a desire to give pecuniary aid to one who was poor.

"Miss Brandon, should you know Madge Vernon better than you do, you will find out that her friendship gold will never buy."

"I serve your brother from friendship alone."

"It is a strange friendship that causes you to do as you have—I would call it love," said Joyce.

"You are mistaken, for no word or look of love ever passed between your brother and I."

"He saved my life, and I returned the favor by saving his, and still gratitude causes me to act in this case; but it is not love."

"It is well for your sake that it is not," said Joyce kindly.

But Madge took the words differently, and said hotly.

"You need not fear, Miss Brandon, that I would love beneath me, for a fugitive murderer could not win my heart."

Joyce winced under the shot, but answered:

"Do not be angry with me, for I spoke in kindness, knowing that my brother had won hearts to cast them aside, and that his love for you would not be that he would feel for one whom he felt he would wish to make his wife."

"Miss Brandon, you are well born, aristocratic, beautiful and very rich—I am called beautiful, I am poor, and no one here knows aught of my antecedents, while my father is hinted at as a smuggler, and even said to have been a former pirate."

"Your brother is a fugitive under a fearful ban, and yet I look upon myself as your equal, for I know that I am an honest girl, and no one can say more."

"I like you, I do not wish to quarrel with you, so do not again hint that I am one to become the toy of any man, for I am just as proud of my fair name as you are of yours."

Joyce Brandon possessed a noble nature, though it had been a trifle warped by her proud parents, who had tried to school into the hearts

of their children that they were superior to others in life.

She saw that she had hurt Madge, and stepping forward she said frankly:

"Forgive me, for I meant not to wound you, and let us be friends."

As she spoke she kissed Madge on the forehead; and into the eyes of the Kennebec maid came tears, as she grasped the hand of the aristocratic beauty, and said:

"We will be friends, Miss Brandon, and I will save your brother from the shameful death that threatens him, that he may prove that he is not the assassin and robber he is accused of being."

Without another word she turned and left the room, and soon after went on aboard the schooner and threw herself down to rest in a cabin state-room that had been placed at her disposal for she was very weary.

She was just dropping off to sleep when the sharp hail of the officer of the deck startled her with:

"Boat ahoy!"

"Ahoy the cutter!" came the response.

Springing up Madge approached the stern port and looked out.

A boat lay not far off, and it held a single occupant.

"That voice was familiar, and I have seen his face before; but when and where?" said Madge, as she gazed upon the occupant of the boat, who called out:

"I would like to see the captain, sir."

"Lieutenant Maynard is ashore, with four fifths of the crew looking up a murderer," answered the officer of the deck, who was a middy.

"Could I come on board and await his return, sir?"

"You could find him quicker on shore."

"I have important news for him, sir, and I do not wish to be seen on shore."

"Ah! then come aboard, my man, and make yourself comfortable forward until the commander returns— Ah! here he comes now," and Madge saw a boat in the distance, coming toward the cutter, and in it recognized Mayo Maynard.

"I must know who that man is, and what his important news is."

"I hope that middy will not tell Lieutenant Maynard, I am in my state-room," and Madcap Madge hastened into her state-room and closed the door behind her.

CHAPTER X.

A PLOT OVERHEARD.

MADCAP MADGE had not been very long in her state-room, when she heard the boat come alongside that bore the young commander of the cutter.

She heard also the middy tell him that a man was forward who wished to see him.

"Send him to the cabin," was the answer, and then Mayo Maynard added:

"We will sail as soon as the crew come aboard, and our voyage has been a fruitless one."

As still as death did Madge lay in her bunk, awaiting to hear what would be said by the man whom she felt she had before met, though when and where, she could not tell.

She did not wish to be an eavesdropper, but somehow she felt that it would be to her advantage to listen, and she hardly breathed as the stranger entered the cabin.

"Well, my man, you desire to see me?" said Mayo Maynard, as the man entered.

"Yes, sir, for I have news for you."

"Indeed! What about?"

"You are in search of Lieutenant Noel Brandon, who is a fugitive from justice, I believe?"

"Do you know aught of him?"

"I know where he can be found, sir."

"Then at once tell me, and—"

"I am a poor man, captain, and the secret is worth something to me."

"Ah! you wish gold for your information?"

"Yes, sir."

"How much?"

"How much is the lieutenant worth to you, sir?"

"To me, nothing; but the Government would doubtless pay a reward for his capture."

"You came here to take him, sir?"

"Yes."

"And will have to return without him unless I tell you where he is in hiding?"

"Yes."

"Then it ought to be worth a few hundreds to you, sir."

"I'll give you a couple of hundred if you will show me where he is."

"It's a bargain, captain; but you better wait until dark, and then I'll pilot a boat to his hiding place."

"Why not now?"

"Well, sir, his sister is in the village, waiting to see your vessel sail, and if you went by daylight the villagers might resist your taking him, for he's very popular, and you don't wish any trouble with them."

"No, so I'll wait."

"When the crew comes on board, sir, you might set sail and run down the river, returning after dark, and then I will take a boat to capture Lieutenant Noel."

"Very well, I will do as you deem best in the matter, my man; but who are you?"

"A poor river sailor, sir, who has cutubs at home to feed."

"Do you not wish service aboard ship?"

"No, sir, for I can not leave home, as I am the only protector, and I can pick up an honest living in these waters."

"How did you find out where Mr. Brandon is in hiding?"

"I was on the river fishing last night, sir, and saw the one who went to the inn and warned him, and then she came out with him and took him to the hiding-place."

"Ha! it was his sister then?"

"No, sir, it was not."

"Who else could have aided him?"

"When your cutter came up the river to-day I saw a girl at her wheel."

"Ah! Madge, the Kennebec Maid they call her."

"Yes, sir."

"No man ever handled a craft better than she does," said Maynard with enthusiastic admiration.

"Oh yes, she knows it all, for she's had practice on dark and stormy nights, I guess, as they say her father is a smuggler."

"I can not believe that the girl would do a wrong act, and it is but idle gossip."

"May be, sir! but she's a woman, and it's hard to find out about them; but she's the one that warned the leftenant of his danger."

"Impossible!"

"No, captain, my eyes do not deceive me."

"But she piloted my vessel into a harbor last night, and then ran her up to this anchorage to-day."

"Was she on board all night?"

"No, she went to her home, which was not far from her last night's anchorage."

"She came up here and warned the leftenant of his danger, sir."

"Can it be possible?" and Mayo Maynard seemed utterly amazed.

"How did he know you were after him, sir?"

"True, he did know that, and escaped."

"She warned him, for she doubtless knew why you had come."

"Yes, for I told her."

"She did it, and then went back and acted as your pilot up here."

"Where is she now, sir?"

"On shore."

"Is she to run you out to sea again?"

"Yes, she so promised."

"Well, sir, when she comes off, say nothing about the work on hand for to-night, and, as I do not wish her to see me, I'll go forward and go below until night."

"Very well, and I'll go with you to-night and have my crew ready."

"If you find my man for me, I will pay you. Now go forward and keep out of sight, for I shall return ashore to get the men on board as soon as possible."

The man left the cabin, and Madge gave a sigh of relief, which was repeated with gusto as she heard Lieutenant Maynard go on deck and then row away.

She went into the cabin, watched him land, and then coolly went on deck.

The young middy doffed his cap, and seemed inclined for a chat, but she said to him:

"I am going ashore, sir, but will be back in ample time to run the cutter to sea."

The middy bowed, but was disappointed, having evidently been smitten by the beauty of the young girl.

Going over the side into her skiff, which Mayo Maynard had not observed, she rowed rapidly shoreward.

Landing, she walked swiftly along the village street until she came to an humble cottage, standing off to itself, and near the shore.

About it were indications that its owner was half-sailor and half-landsman, for boats were on the shore, and wagons and horses in the yard.

It was the home of Saunders, the cartman.

A freckled-face boy was playing on the shore, and approaching him, Madge asked:

"Is Silly Sam here, my little lad?"

"Yes, miss, he's lyin' down in the house, for he got shot last night."

"Ask him if he will come out here for a moment."

"He'll come, for he likes you a heap."

"Who am I?" asked the maiden with a smile.

"Madcap Madge o' ther Ken'bec, and I likes you to, for you is awful pretty."

Madge blushed, and handing the lad a piece of silver, said

CHAPTER XI.

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN.

IT was a bitter moment and a most trying situation for Darke Darrell when he found himself not only thwarted in his well-arranged plan, but in desperate danger of his life.

He had certainly reason to believe that, in a plot so well planned and carried out to the moment of his attack upon Lieutenant Noel Brandon on the highway, that he could not fail.

With only Silly Sam as his companion, unsuspecting danger, and taken wholly at a disadvantage, he did not doubt but that he and his two companions could easily master the sailor and the half-foolish driver.

But Madge, in her recklessness, had wholly thwarted him in the murder and robbery contemplated, while she had captured his vessel and made a fugitive of him.

He had tried to get upon the yacht, as the reader will remember, but had been driven off, and hanging under the counter, when Madge had sailed shoreward, he had managed to cut the painter of his boat as it was in tow, and thus had the means of making his escape.

It was not desirable to be found there, he well knew, but just what to do he did not know.

At last, as he sat in the shadow of the shore, resting upon his oars, an idea seemed to strike him forcibly, for he at once pulled away at a strong, but silent, stroke.

"This is the boat I got in the village, so that is all right, and, if recognized, there is no particular hold upon me, for Noel Brandon did not die, and no one would connect me with tonight's affair.

"What more natural than that I should return to see my poor old mother?

"I will go," and away he pulled, heading across the water toward the other shore.

After a rapid row he lay upon his oars, directly in front of the little cabin where dwelt the widow Darrell, his mother.

A light burned in one of the rooms, which he knew was the place where his mother sat every evening.

"She has not retired, and is doubtless thinking of me.

"Ah! I would that I was more worthy of her love; but then I went away as a boy, and I suppose I shall never change.

"I wonder if old deaf Maggie and her half-blind son are still at the cottage?

"I suppose so, for mother would hardly live alone here in these troublous times, though they would be little protection.

"They have doubtless gone to bed, and so will not know when I returned, if asked the hour.

"I do not wish to get into any trouble here, for the villagers never loved me, and their memories will not fail them, should suspicion fall upon me.

"But it is my only chance, so here goes."

He sent the boat ashore with several vigorous strokes, and making it fast, ascended toward the cottage.

He had been in the water, and his clothes were wet, but he would make some excuse for that.

Knocking at the door, he heard a movement within, and then a woman's voice asked:

"Who is it?"

"Mother!"

"Oh God! is it my son's voice, or is he dead, and this a warning?" cried the woman.

"It is your son, mother; Darke himself, in flesh and bone, and no ghost," came the answer from without.

With a glad cry of joy, and trembling fingers the poor mother drew back the bolts, and the prodigal sprung into the room and clasped her in his arms.

"At last! at last!" cried the happy mother, as the tears of joy streamed from her eyes, and she held her arms about her son's neck, as though fearing he would escape from her.

Did no pang of bitter remorse enter the soul of that wicked wanderer then?

Did he not feel, that guilt-stained though he was, a mother's love welcomed him back with joy?

No, his heart was too callous to feel deeply, and yet he had to feign an emotion that was not real.

"Mother, I am home again, after long years of wandering, and this is the happiest moment of my life.

"Sit down, dear old lady, and let me see if your wild, prodigal son, your runaway boy, has added many gray hairs to your locks."

"My son, I am growing old fast, and your absence and silence have been a sore trial to me, now when I need the aid of your strong arms.

"Yes, my hair is whiter now, and my heart has been full of sorrow; but your coming will make me young again, and I can throw the lie into the teeth of those who have slandered you.

"They said you would not return, Darke, and told me you had been recognized upon a pirate deck, by some Kennebec sailors, and that you would be hanged as a sea-rover; but I knew they spoke falsely, my son.

"You were wild in the years gone by, and you did wicked things; but now that you have come back to me, all is forgiven and will be forgotten.

"But your clothes are wet, and—"

"I made a misstep and went overboard, mother."

"And where have you been all these years?"

"Roaming the world over, mother, and trying to make money to give you comforts in your old age."

"I have the farm, Darke, and a neighbor works it on shares, so I have a comfortable living, for Maggie and her son are, like myself, easily pleased."

"They are with you yet?"

"Yes, they have been most faithful for the home I have given them, and they will be glad to welcome you; but they have retired long ago, as at dark they seek their beds like the chickens, while I often sit up here until midnight, working and thinking of you, and I have knitted you plenty of socks, my son, and made you some clothes, too, but you have grown to be such a large man I fear they will not fit you, for I forgot about your growing up, and always thought of you as a youth."

"How strange that you should wear a beard!" and the poor woman gazed with admiration upon her son.

"I will shave it off in the morning, mother, and look natural once more to you, and I think the clothes you made will suit me, so will put them on, too, as my luggage was lost."

"What a pity, Darke; but you intend to remain at home now?" she asked in a startled way, grasping his arm.

"For awhile, mother; and I shall not then go far; but I have some business interests that may call me quite often to Boston."

And thus the two—the forgiving, noble mother, the wicked, heartless son—talked far into the night, and then Darke Darrell retired to his own little room, and throwing himself upon his bed, was almost instantly asleep, for the prickings of a guilty conscience disturbed not his slumbers.

It was late when he awoke, for his mother let him sleep.

He found a home-spun suit of clothes, clean underwear, and all to make him present a good appearance, for the fond mother had slipped noiselessly into his room and placed all by his bedside.

Then a delicious breakfast awaited him, and a warm welcome from Deaf Maggie and Tommie, her cross-eyed son, who were the widow's help.

In those days news traveled slowly, for telegraphs, railroads and telephones were unknown, and a mail each week was all that the villagers received, so that the day passed without any knowledge to the widow of the return of Noel Brandon and the attack upon him.

Night drawing near, Darke became uneasy, and told his mother he would run over to the village after supper.

She hated to see him go, but yielded, and he rowed away, towing a light skiff in which to return, after he had taken back the boat he had hired of Bob Brail the boatman.

Darke Darrell was anxious to learn whether Noel Brandon and Silly Sam had been killed, and the opinion regarding the attack.

He found Bob Brail at his dock, and paying him liberally for the hire of the boat, casually asked him the news.

"Hain't you widow Darrell's runaway son?" asked boatman Brail, eying him closely as they stood in the glare of the lantern.

"That is just who I am, Bob, and I was going to see how long it would be before you recognized me."

"I thought I knew your figurehead, but then it's been years since I seen you."

"Has you come back to stay, Darke?"

"Yes."

"It's lucky you didn't have to stay away forever, as would have been the case had you committed murder when you thought you had; but folks tell strange stories ag'in' you now, and I only hopes, for your mother's sake, they hain't true."

"Folks lie, Bob, and they've got nothing else to do here."

"Wal, it's strange that just as you comes back, Noel Brandon does the same, and he is set on, on the river road, while driving home, and is nearly killed, along with Silly Sam who was with him."

Darke Darrell started, and feigning surprise, got out of the boatman all that had happened, as he knew it.

"The lufftenant is lyin' wounded up at the Flag Ship, and Silly Sam is at the home o' Saunders the cartman, with a gash in his head, while that darin' gal, Kennebec Madge have captured a prize, and takes it home with her, as she desarves, fer but fer her the lufftenant and Sam would have been killed."

"I am sorry to hear all this, Bob, but I must return home now, as mother will be anxious about me."

"Has you come to stay?"

"Oh, yes, for I have sown my wild oats, Bob, and may turn out a dominie yet, for stranger things have happened."

"Yes, and you seems to have gold, as you paid me liberal."

"I have ample for my needs, Bob."

"Tain't dishonest gold, is it, Darke?"

"Bob, you don't wish to say unkind things to me, if you wish me to be your friend, and I'll make the gossips prove what they have spread around regarding me."

"Good-night!" and Darke Darrell sprung into his skiff and rowed away.

After rowing out of sight of Bob Brail, he rested on his oars and let his boat drift, while he became lost in thought.

It was growing late, and the tide was running up and near its full, so that he was borne slowly by the village.

Gazing upon it with a strange interest, he did not touch his oars, and the current sent him by, then he came to a standstill, and the changing tide bore him down the stream once more.

Still he did not touch his oars, until presently he heard the splash of a paddle in the water.

He was under the shadow of the land, and remaining motionless and uneasy, he saw the boat glide by.

It was a small, light skiff, and had but a single occupant.

"It is that girl, as I live! I will follow and see just what she is after," he muttered.

He then continuing paddled up-stream in the wake of the boat, saw it run ashore at the garden shore of the Flag Ship Inn, and waiting, beheld Madge come back, and not alone.

He dogged the skiff to the Hermit Sailor's shore, and soon after saw Madge start down the river, and she was alone in the boat, pulling at a strong, rapid stroke.

"I could not catch her if I tried, for she pulls like a whaler; but all this means something, and I will find it out to-morrow."

"So she has my sloop, as a prize?"

"Well, I need that little craft, and will have it; but let it remain where it is for the present."

"Now to return home, and Tommie can go over to the village to-morrow and find out what is going on there."

Seizing his oars he sent his boat flying homeward, and late as it was, found his mother sitting up awaiting him, and dreading that he had gone to the inn, and been led away by his old comrades.

But she gave a sigh of relief as he appeared, and accepted without suspicion, his excuse, that he had been "talking over old times with Bob Brail the boatman."

CHAPTER XII.

THE BOY PILOT.

SHORTLY after her interview with Silly Sam, Madcap Madge glided up the stairs of the Flag Ship Inn, carrying in her hand a bundle, which she had not had when going to the Saunders cottage.

She went straight to the chamber which she knew was occupied for the day by Joyce Brandon, and receiving a summons, to her knock, to enter, she walked into the room.

Joyce was racing to and fro, the long skirt of her riding-habit thrown over her arm, and her face bore an anxious, wearied look.

"Have they found him?" she eagerly asked, coming toward Madge as she entered.

"No, Miss Brandon, and it is to prevent their doing so that I have just been carrying out a little plot, and I wish you to help me a little."

"Willingly."

"The fact is there is one man who knows where your brother is, and I will tell you how I know it," and Madge told what she had heard from her state-room on the cutter.

"This is terrible," said Joyce, turning deadly pale.

"It would be if they found him, but that is just what they shall not do."

"But can you prevent it?"

"Yes."

"You are a wonderful girl, but for the life of me I cannot see how."

"I have just sent a messenger to warn your brother of his danger, and also to tell him where to seek refuge, and this will enable him to escape as soon as it is dark."

"Ah, that I could see poor Noel, my misguided brother."

"That would be impracticable, if possible; but have no fear, for he will escape all right, and you can return home with the feeling that he has done so."

"To-morrow morning, if you wish to know all about it, ride down to my cottage and I will be on the lookout for you."

"I will come; but you said that I could aid you?"

"Yes."

"You need money?"

"Oh, no; should I do so, I have ample; but it will not do for me to return on board the cutter after what I heard, at least as Madge Vernon, so I got a person to furnish me with a suit of youth's clothing, sailor hat and all, and I want you to help dress me up."

"Madge Vernon, what would you do?"

"Go on the cutter as a boy."

"A boy?"

"Yes, I'll pretend to be the brother of myself, you understand, and say sister Madge could not come, so sent me aboard to pilot the cutter out to sea."

"They'll find you out."

"Oh, no, for I'll look the boy, you may be sure, and my supposed kinship to myself will account for any resemblance."

"Then it will be night, for I'll not go off to the cutter until I see her about to get under way, and I'll leave her before dawn."

"What is your reason for this bold step?"

"I promised to pilot the cutter back to sea, and so I wish to keep my word as near as I can by sending a supposed substitute."

"You would put on a man's garb to do this?"

"I have another reason."

"Well?"

"I wish to find out just who that man is, who is going to betray your brother's hiding-place, for he means mischief, and it is best that I should know him."

"Let me urge you against this bold act, Madge, if you will so let me call you."

"It is my name, Miss Brandon, so why should I object?"

"And mine, to you, is Joyce, so let us drop all formality."

"As you wish; but now help to rig me out, please, and see if I don't make a jolly sailor lad!"

The long locks were gathered in folds upon the top of the head, and the tarpaulin was drawn on in such a way as to cast the face in shadow, and also give the idea that the hair was cropped short.

Then the face, with its beautiful complexion, browned though it was, was dotted to represent freckles, and lined so that it appeared older.

Next a suit of duck pants and blouse shirt, with a black cravat knotted under the collar, was put on, and the small boots gave place to a pair of heavy shoes.

"Now!" cried Madge, with a smile at herself as she appeared in the glass.

"No one would ever know you, Madge; but your hands are frightfully small for a boy's."

"I'll keep them out of sight all I can, while a little tar and dirt will alter them greatly."

"Now, I'll bundle up my things, to get the next time I come to town, and it is time you should be starting for home, as dark will overtake you."

"After last night's experience alone in the forest, and waiting on the river-bank for your return, I feel no fear; but still I wish to relieve my parents' minds as soon as I can."

"But I will see you go on the cutter before I leave, and watch the result as well as I can."

"Well, here goes; good-by, Joyce, and believe me that I will do all in my power to save your brother, who, if I believed guilty of the crime he is accused of, I would as readily hunt him down."

"Come to-morrow, and you will know all."

She held out her hand, but Joyce went forward and kissed her, and Madge glided from the room.

Watching her chance, she slipped out of the inn into the garden, gained her boat, and tossing her bundle of clothes, which she had boldly decided at the last minute to bring with her, into a locker, she pulled rapidly away from the shore, seen only by Joyce Brandon, who from her window watched her course with anxiety.

It was getting late in the afternoon, the sun was drawing near the horizon, and looking down the river Madge saw the two boats belonging to the cutter leaving the village dock, their crews returning after their fruitless search.

"The commander's gig is alongside, so he is on board, and I can see him alone."

"He has sharp eyes, has the handsome Lieutenant Maynard, but I do not believe they can see through my disguise."

"If he does, then I must take the consequences."

"Ho ther cutter!" she called out in a shrill voice, as the middy on deck hailed with:

"What boat is that?"

"Ay ay, do you wish to come on board?"

"I does."

"To ship as a cabin boy?"

"No! I heads fer ther quarter-deck," was the reply, spoken in the voice of a spoiled youth.

"Come aboard then," said the middy, and as the disguised Madge climbed over the side he continued:

"What do you want my lad?"

"Ter see ther cap'n."

"Lieutenant Maynard, there is a youngster here to see you, sir," called the middy down the companionway.

"Send him down: but has the Girl Pilot come off yet?"

"No, sir."

Down the companionway darted Madge, and nodding to Mayo Maynard, who was reading, she stood looking around her in apparent wonder.

"Well, sir what can I do for you?" asked the lieutenant, amused at the youth, as he supposed his visitor to be.

"Is you Cap'n Maynard?"

"I am the commander of this vessel, and my name is Maynard."

"Oh! then you is the one I want."

"Well, sir, here I am, and I'll be obliged if you will make known the cause of your visit."

"Do you know Madge, the Girl Pilot of the Kennebec?"

"I do, and I am expecting her on board every minute."

"I'm her brother, and my name's Nat."

"I am glad to meet the brother of the fair maid of the Kennebec, and if a beautiful flower and a cat-o-nine tails can look alike, you resemble your sister amazingly."

"So folks says, only I hain't quite so han'some."

"No, not quite: but where is your sister?"

"She hain't coming."

"What! not coming to pilot the cutter out to sea again?"

"No, for she can't come, and so sent me."

"But are you a sailor?"

"Try me!"

"And know these waters?"

"Just as well as sis does."

"But why can't your sister come?"

"She's specter back home, and had to go to meet him: but I'm a prime pilot don't you get skeert that I hain't."

"Well, I'll have to trust you, as you come so well recommended: but you look more like a devilish imp of a cabin boy than a pilot."

"Looks is deceivin', cap'n, sometimes."

"True: but I am greatly disappointed your sister did not come."

"So's the middy on deck, I guess."

"Well, go on deck and console him as best you can, and when the boats come on board I'll need your services."

"Likely," said the supposed youth in the quaint, irresistibly funny way which Madge had adopted, and she went on deck.

Glancing at the middy with a sly wink, she sprung upon the bulwarks, as nimbly as a cat might have done, and going up the ratlines perched herself aloft, coolly gazing around her.

"Ho, you impudent imp, what are you doing up there?" cried the middy, as soon as his surprise allowed him to speak.

"Looking."

"Come down after that, or I'll have the cat after you."

"I loves cats," was the imperturbable answer, and the midshipman was growing angry when his commander came on deck.

He had heard what passed and was laughing.

"Mr. Ellis, that is our new pilot, and the brother of the fair Maid of the Kennebec whom you admire so much."

"Ah! she is not coming on board then, sir?" asked Ellis in a disappointed tone.

"It seems not, and yonder imp is sent in her place, so do not be cross with him."

"Certainly not, sir; I did not know the rascal was her brother," and raising his voice he called out:

"You can remain where you are, my lad; it is all right."

"Yes, it's all right, for I saw the cap'n tell you so," came back the answer, and just then the boats came alongside.

"Now, Lieutenant Raymond, we will get under way and head seaward," said Mayo Maynard.

"You give up the search then?"

"No, but I wish the villagers to believe that we have."

"And our fair pilot?"

"Cannot come on board, but sends her substitute, her brother, who is up there on the mizzen-top."

"We will run down the river until it is dark, and then put back, keeping well on the other shore, and there is a man on board who pledges himself to find Noel Brandon for me."

"I had almost hoped that he might escape."

"For the sake of his lovely sister so had I; but it is our duty to take him if we can."

"Call that imp down if you need him, and see if he knows what to do before we attempt to run out at night under his pilotage," and Mayo Maynard returned to the cabin while the Scorpion set sail, and, with the light skiff of Madge in tow, started down toward the sea.

CHAPTER XIV.

SILLY SAM'S MISSION.

SILLY SAM was superstitious, for, though he held no fear of mankind in the flesh, he yet dreaded the spooks and spirits that many of that day believed walked this globe terrestrial after nightfall.

He also had a dread of those said to possess supernatural powers, and avoided a witch as he would Satan.

Gossip had it that the old Hermit Sailor was endowed with certain weird qualities, and it was said that he was living a life of penance for his crimes, and that it was surely bad luck to hold converse with him.

On several occasions Silly Sam, seeing Captain Kyd on shore or in his boat, had precipitately taken to his heels, or pulled away, to avoid the calamity of a word between them.

So the reader will understand that when Madcap Madge called upon Silly Sam and asked him to go to the Hermit Sailor for her, she astounded him.

"Oh!" he gasped.

"Why Sam, what ails you?" she asked.

"It's bad luck, Miss Madge."

"What is bad luck!"

"To speak to that old wizard."

"Nonsense! he is a poor old man, who is living his latter years in poverty, and with no friends, and I often see him; but, of course, if you are afraid of him, from listening to the tales of old women, I will find some one else to do my errand for me."

"I don't like to go, and I don't like to refuse you, Madge."

"Well, Jack Buntline will go if I ask it," and she half-turned away.

Now, Jack Buntline was the worthy son of the host of the Flag Ship Inn, and Sam knew him to be desperately in love with Madge, and looked upon him as a rival.

He was a good-looking youth, and half the girls in the village were in love with him, and Silly Sam saw trouble ahead if Madge went to him, so he blurted out:

"You don't have to go to Jack Buntline, Madge, or to any other durned fool, for I'd do what you asked, if it was to go to Old Nick himself."

"You are a dear, good fellow, Sam, and I appreciate all you do," said Madge, who had not the remotest idea of going to Jack Buntline or any one else.

"Well, what am I to do, Madge?"

"You are just to go in and get me Will Saunders's sailor suit, the one he had when he was a cabin-boy on the United States frigate."

"But what do you want with it, Madge?"

"I want is as a pattern, and when he comes home, give him this to buy another with, if I have not returned it."

"Here's gold enough to buy three suits, Madge."

"I don't care, give it to him for his suit, so now get it for me, tarpaulin, shoes, and all."

Silly Sam re-entered the house and soon returned with the bundle of articles he had been sent for.

"Now, Sam, the moment it is dark, but not before, mind you, go to the hut of the Hermit Sailor, and—"

"Couldn't I go in daytime, Madge?"

"No."

"All right," he said, in a resigned way, as though determined to make the best of it.

"Tell the Hermit Sailor that I sent you to tell his guest— Do you understand?"

"You know they say I'm silly, Madge, but I understand all you tell me."

"Well, tell the Hermit Sailor to get his guest ready to leave, and you take the best sailing skiff you can hire, and run him down the river to the Mystic Cove—you know it?"

"Yes."

"Run in there, and take your passenger into the cave, after which you return home alone."

"Who is he, Madge?"

"One who is your friend, and whom you will serve for himself, as well as because I ask it."

"But I don't know him."

"It is Lieutenant Brandon."

"Oh! I'll do all I can for him; and I was afraid the Government sailors would find him to-day, and I heard some of them say, as reached Saunders's cottage, how he'd be strung up to the yard-arm mighty quick."

"Then you must protect him by doing as I tell you."

"I'll do it, Madge; but he'll starve in the cave if left alone."

"No, for I'll see that he does not; and I'll get my father to row him to Portland, or some other port, as soon as he returns."

"All right, Madge, I'll do as you say; but you must not fall in love with Master Noel."

"Bah! don't be a fool, Sam."

"Folks call me one."

"If you talk that way, I'll agree with them; but don't forget to do just as I tell you, and Master Noel will be saved; if not, he'll hang, for the cutter's crew are to reach the hermit's hut to-night."

"You don't say so!"

"Yes."

"Well, they won't find Master Noel, that's sure," and Silly Sam stood watching Madcap Madge, as she walked away, with a strange expression upon his face, while he muttered, as he passed his hand over his head:

"My head seems clearer for that shot, and I believe I thinks better than I did; but somehow my heart seems heavier when I thinks of Madge."

"I wish I understood everything, and wasn't silly," and with a sigh he strolled slowly down toward the shore to get a boat ready for the night's work before him, his brain in a whirl at having to serve Madcap Madge, and pleased to be able to render a service to Noel Brandon, yet wondering why the Maid of the Kennebec was so deeply interested in the fugitive sailor.

of a clear intellect, was yet brave, cunning, good hearted to those in misfortune, faithful to his friends and a bitter foe to those whom he did not like.

He performed all duties devolving upon him, with good will, haste and well, and he laid aside the larger part of all his meager earnings, until he had a nice little sum put by, of which no one knew anything.

As the shadows of night deepened, Silly Sam stepped into his boat and pulled leisurely toward the wooded point on which stood the Hermit Sailor's hut.

It was a wild, bold point of land, jutting out from the main shore, with rocks piled up high here and there, ravines, and heavily wooded with pines stout and rugged.

In the entrance to one of the ravines, built against a wall of overhanging rock, the hut stood, and above it and about it were sheltering pines, through which the winds played a low requiem in calm weather, and shrieked most dismal when a storm raged.

Sixty feet from the cabin door was the beach, and the roar of the waves, when the waters were rough, mingled with the sighing of the pines.

A half of a mile distant was the first house of the village, and the Flag Ship Inn, the center of the little place, was a mile away.

But no youth or maiden, in their love-strolls, was ever known to go near the cabin of the Hermit Sailor, and he was left severely alone.

He was wont to sit upon a rock, watching the movements in the village, and the sail-boats or trading-vessels upon the waters, but none came near him.

He was seated upon his favorite perch when Silly Sam left the shore, and he saw him as he headed toward the point.

"Am I to have a visitor?" muttered the old hermit, and he walked down to the shore as the boat drew near in the gloom.

"Ah! you are he whom they call Silly Sam?" he said, as Sam sprung ashore and confronted him.

"Yes, I am a fool, and folks make it known by calling me so."

"You are not such a fool as many who so call you, boy, for you have manliness in your face, if Heaven has blighted your brain; but why have you come here, to the home of one whom men and women alike shun?"

"Madge Vernon sent me."

"Ah! and why?"

"She sent me to tell you that the cutter has not gone, only run down toward the sea to deceive the people, and that there is a man on board who saw Master Noel come here last night, and that the crew are to return and search your hut, so I am to take him away."

"This is valuable information you bring, lad, and we will look to it at once."

"Come with me."

The hermit led the way to his cabin, opened the door, and by the aid of a ship's lantern, the interior was revealed.

It was by no means uncomfortable, furnished with what had evidently once been in ships, and was large and inviting as an abode.

At a table, reading, sat Noel Brandon, his wounded leg supported on a board placed on two stools before him.

His face was pale and stern, and he seemed rather to read mechanically than with interest.

He looked up quickly as the hermit entered, and seeing Silly Sam, stretched forth his hand with the remark:

"Ho, Sam, so you have come to see me?"

"I am glad to see you are able to be out, for I feared you had been hard hit."

"My head is a hard one, Master Noel, but Madcap Madge sent me after you, as the cutter returns soon to search the hermit's cabin."

"Ah! then I had better not remain here to be discovered, for I am sure this charge against me is a plot, and it will not be cleared up until after I am hanged."

"What am I to do, admiral?" and Noel Brandon turned calmly to the old hermit, whom he had dubbed "admiral."

"The lad has his orders where to take you, sir, but—"

"Well, admiral, why do you hesitate?"

"I could hide you here so that no one would ever find you; but—"

"Again you pause."

"Did I do so, I would have to betray a secret I have sworn no one shall know until my death."

"Do you think I would betray you?"

"Oh no, Noel Brandon, for you are every inch a man, though reckless and wild in the past; yet I feel I owe a duty to myself not to betray a secret I have long kept, and to hide you here would be to do so."

"Then I will go with Silly Sam."

"It is better so, for that girl has decided what is best, and Sam will do as she says and you could not be in better hands."

"Well, admiral, I thank you for what you have done for me, and I hope to meet you again some day."

"Come, Sam, you'll have to lend me a hand, for I am too badly crippled to help myself much."

Silly Sam sprung to his side, the hermit got

his crutches and other things, and slowly the three passed out of the cabin.

Taking his place in the stern of the boat, Noel Brandon settled himself as comfortably as was possible, and Sam seized the oars.

"Good-by, admiral, and God bless you," said Noel in his terse, stern way, and the old hermit waved his hand in farewell, as the oar-blades dropped into the water, and Silly Sam sent the light skiff flying away.

"Which way, Sam?"

"To other shore, Master Noel, so as to keep in shadow while the cutter passes."

"You think she will come then?"

"She is coming, see!" and Sam pointed to a dark object in the distance.

"Your are right; it is the cutter: but she is not showing a light, and has very little sail set, to avoid attracting attention."

"Madge was right, Sam."

"She always is," was the quiet rejoinder, and Sam pulled on in silence.

Running close in under the shore, into the land shadows that fell upon the water, Sam headed the skiff down the stream.

In a short while they were opposite to the cutter, which was standing up toward the point of land where dwelt the Hermit Sailor.

"They do not see us, Sam, so we are safe."

"Yes, and we'll be in Mystic Cove before she returns," and Sam resumed his oars once more, pulling with his powerful, sweeping stroke, which seemed never to tire.

On the deck of the cutter, near the wheel, stood Mayo Maynard, his officers and the man who was to betray the hiding-place of Noel Brandon.

At the wheel stood "Nat the Pilot," as Madge was called, not one on board suspecting that the impudent boy was other than he claimed to be.

"You know the water close in toward the point, Nat?" asked Mayo Maynard.

"I've got every rock there named," was the reply.

"Well, be careful you don't find one you have forgotten, and knock a hole in our hull."

"You kin knock a hole in my head, cap'n, if I does."

"I tell yer I knows these waters from Cape Elizabeth to Penobscot bay, and the Kennebec is my home, while all the rocks knows me, and jist gits out o' ther way as they sees me comin'."

"Does yer wish ter round ther point, so they won't see yer land from ther village, and will think yer has gone up the river?"

"A good idea, Nat, so hunt us an anchorage, and we'll run ashore in a boat with muffled oars," answered Mayo Maynard, and fifteen minutes after, Nat ran the cutter into a snug harbor beyond the point.

"Come, Lauderdale, you go with me, and I wish a sergeant and four marines besides the boat's crew, for there is no knowing what we may find here."

"Where is that guide?"

"I am here, sir," and the stranger stepped forward.

As the lieutenant descended into the boat, he found Nat calmly seated in the stern.

"Who told you to come, sir?"

"Hain't I pilot?"

"Yes, but you are not needed here."

"That is just where yer don't know, cap'n, for it's harder ter put a boat ashore here, and not trip her on ther rocks, then it is ter run a craft in the river."

"This is no place for a boy," said the stranger.

"You hain't cap'n, so take a reef in yer tongue," said the supposed lad.

"I know these waters well, sir," the stranger remarked to Lieutenant Maynard.

"Cap'n, you don't know him, and you does know me and my family, so you better take me along, in case that gent don't turn out right."

"You can go, Nat; give way," and the boat shot away from the cutter's side.

Nat took the tiller without being ordered to do so, guided the boat shoreward, here and there avoiding a rock that just rose to the surface of the water, and soon landed on the beach near the hermit's hut.

In silence the party landed, and without a sound reached the cabin.

All was still within and no light was visible.

A loud knock upon the door with a sword-hilt, brought an instant query:

"Well, who is it?"

"Open in the name of the United States Government," demanded Lieutenant Maynard.

"Shipmate, these are troublesome times, and I am but an old man, poor and friendless; but there are those who believe I have got money, and I do not care to open my door until I know just who you are and why you have come."

"I do not blame you for that, Sir Hermit, so I will tell you frankly I am Lieutenant Maynard, commanding the United States Cutter Scorpion, and I have come to search your cabin for I a prisoner it is reported is hiding here."

"My dear sir, you are at liberty to search my cabin, I assure you; but why such a report should have reached you, I cannot understand."

"One minute, and I will light a lantern and open my door."

"Watch well that no one gets out by a secret door," cried the stranger.

"This hain't no castle with secret doors and dungi's, man," sneered Nat.

In a moment a light gleamed within, and then the door was unlatched and opened.

The hermit looked like a patriarch of old with his long white hair and beard, and with a long red gown thrown around him.

In one hand he held a lantern, and in the other a sword, which he lowered upon catching sight of Mayo Maynard, while he said:

"Had you proven other than you stated, sir, I could but have defended my life and died sword in hand."

Struck with his majestic presence, Mayo Maynard saluted, and responded:

"We mean you no harm, sir, as I am simply doing my duty in searching for a noted prisoner."

"Walk in, sir, and search my humble cabin—but hold there! you do not cross my threshold, Darke Darrell, for I recognize you, though years have passed since last we met," and the Hermit Sailor confronted Darke Darrell, for he was the stranger, his sword uplifted as though to strike him down.

CHAPTER XVI.

FOILED.

"Ha! do you flaunt your steel in my face, old man?" came angrily from the lips of Darke Darrell, and snatching a cutlass from one of the crew, in an instant he had crossed the blade of the Hermit Sailor.

A cry arose from the men, and turning quickly, for he had entered the cabin, Mayo Maynard would have interfered, but suddenly saw Nat seize the sword from the hand of Midshipman Lauderdale and spring between the two.

Thrusting the old hermit aside, Nat crossed the blade of Darke Darrell, and in an instant had disarmed him.

"Coward! to attack an old man whose limbs are trembling with age," cried the supposed lad, and in spite of their discipline the crew broke into a cheer.

"My man, you must have a care how you act, and I am glad you met your match in that lad."

"Let me have no more of this, or it will be worse for you," and Mayo Maynard spoke with angry vehemence.

"I was wrong, sir, too; but that man, years ago, caused me much' worry, and something tells me that I owe it to him that you come here to-night to search my poor little shanty."

"I do; for he tells me that you have hidden here Noel Brandon, a former naval officer whom I came here to arrest for a crime committed."

"That man Darrell lies, sir, for I have no one here concealed, as you will discover when you have searched my home."

"Do you deny, old man, that Madcap Madge brought here last night Lieutenant Brandon?" cried Darrell.

"What! my sister do such a thing?"

"Why, man, you are groggy, and dreaming, too, for s's Madge was with me all the time, for we had some work to do that kept us up until nearly daybreak."

"Cap'n, that man is sellin' you lies," and Nat burst forth in laughter.

"My dear sir, for some purpose of his own that man is deceiving you, as the lad says," said the hermit.

"In faith I begin to believe it, and Sir Hermit, I beg your pardon for disturbing your slumbers."

"Come, men!"

"Don't you intend to search the cabin, sir?" asked Darke Darrell.

"No, sir."

"Then I will, for Noel Brandon is surely here."

"You will do nothing of the kind, sir, and I warn you to go your way, ere I be tempted to punish you."

"Captain Maynard, I came to you in good faith, for I saw what I said I did last night, and Noel Brandon was surely brought to this cabin."

"You may sail, sir, in the cutter, but I shall devote myself to the capture of the man you have failed to find, and when I bring him to you then I shall expect the reward for him I shall demand."

"Good-night, sir; you will hear from me again," and Darke Darrell strode away in the darkness, while Mayo Maynard returned to his boat with his men, leaving the Hermit Sailor alone once more.

"Well, Nat, I am glad you came along, as it has turned out," said Mayo Maynard, as they reached the boat.

"Thank you, sir."

"I think you are too fine a young fellow to be a fisher lad in the Kennebec river, and should enter the service."

"I would not leave my sister Madge, cap'n."

"I would soon run you into a middy's berth, and you will work your way up to the command of a vessel, I am sure, before many years."

"I wouldn't leave: is Madge to be a commodore, sir?"

"But you'll have to leave her some day."

"Why?"

"She'll fall in love with some fine fellow and marry him."

"She hain't no softy."

"No what?"

"Softy."

"What is that?"

"Well, it's a girl as makes a fool of herself by believin' what men says to her about lovin' her and all that."

Mayo Maynard laughed and replied:

"Well, I'll wager she'll love some one before long."

Nat was silent, and soon the cutter was reached, the boat was hauled up to the davits, and the fleet vessel went flying seaward.

"Yonder is where I live, cap'n, where you see that light," said Nat, pointing to a high cliff a league away.

"I thought that was a light-house."

"It is a small one, we keeps lighted as a welcome to father, when he comes home by night."

"Your father is skipper of a coaster, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"They say he is an educated man, and the best sailor in these waters, Nat."

"There's but one knows these waters better than he does, cap'n."

"Who is that one?"

"Sis Madge."

"Ah! and how did she come to know them so well?"

"Well, father came here to live when we were small, and sis Madge had a skiff and just fished and hunted all over these waters and islands, and when father was home he took us cruisin' all round here, and she got all down fine."

"And your sister studied hard, too, for she appears well educated."

"Guess she's better learned than the average, though I don't know much."

"You'll learn in time, Nat, from present prospects."

"Shouldn't wonder, cap'n; but I'm a trifle rough as a boy—hain't a bit like sis Madge."

"No, for she is very beautiful, and as brave as she is beautiful, and my heart is in danger when she's around, I frankly confess, though you need not tell her so."

"No, sir, I tells nothing; but yonder's a sail, and when we go a mile further it's even running for you, and I'll take my skiff and go back."

"You have done well, Nat, and I'll reward you well, while I wish also to send a little reward to your sister."

"Cap'n, I don't serve vessels for pay; and if you want to get sis Madge angry, just send her money."

"No, sir, our services is free, and if you want a pilot ag'in, just run in about here, and if it's daytime show a red flag, and if it's night run a red light up to your fore, and some of us will come."

"But, Nat, you surely will not place me under such deep obligations to you, and give me no opportunity to repay you?"

"Sis Madge and me don't take pay, cap'n."

"Well, I shall secure a midshipman's berth in the navy for you, and I feel that you will not refuse it; but, Nat, I was told in the town to look out for a trim craft—a sloop suspected of being a smuggler, and yonder craft coming looks as spruce as a yacht, so I'll bear toward her."

"Did they tell you the name of the craft, cap'n?"

"Yes, Nat, it was the Blue Bell."

"That's the craft yonder, sir, for I recognize her."

"Indeed! then I will bring her to, and board her, then."

"I was just going to ask you to do so, sir, for it's my father's sloop, and I wanted to run back with him."

"Then it is not the Blue Bell?"

"Oh! yes, sir; and my father commands her."

"Indeed! then I certainly was misinformed as to her being suspected of lawlessness."

"No, sir; people suspects all vessels they don't see unloaded as carryin' smuggled goods; and my father does not escape the same kind of stories about him; but I know he'll be only too glad to have you search his sloop, sir."

"No, indeed; I would not think of such a thing, for I am sure it would turn out like the hermit's hut; but I will signal her to come to, while I will have the cutter luff for you to get into your skiff."

The orders were given, and with a hearty shake of the hand with each officer Nat went over the side into the skiff, the painter was cast loose, and the cutter went on her way leaving the little boat dancing in her wake.

The sloop meanwhile had obeyed the signal to lay to, and as the cutter swept on lay rolling upon the waters, while the skiff was pulling rapidly toward it, urged by the disguised Madge.

Suddenly a man on the sloop sprung up and waved a lantern, while he shouted:

"Cutter ahoy!"

"Ahoy the Blue Bell!" answered Mayo Maynard, as the cutter sped on.

"Do you mean to stand on and not board this craft?" continued the man.

"That skiff will board you," plainly came back the answer.

"Ahoy! ahoy the cutter! this is—" but the cry of the man was suddenly silenced by his falling back, or being suddenly dragged down into the cabin companionway, and immediately there followed sounds of a struggle.

A moment passed, and out of the cabin came a tall form bearing a heavy load in his arms, and this was gently lowered over the sloop's side into the sea, while the man who had thrown it overboard glanced at the cutter, and called out:

"Forward there! the cutter is putting about and we must run for it."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered a voice forward, and up from the hold came in haste a score of dark forms, just as a voice out on the waters cried:

"Ho the Blue Bell! do not run off from me!"

"It is the voice of Madge! in God's name what does this mean?" and springing to the helm the speaker let the sloop again fall off, while he cried in a low tone:

"Forward there! down into the hold again!"

In an instant all but two men disappeared from the deck, and a moment after Madge ran alongside and sprung on board, while the cutter was now putting back toward the sloop.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SKIPPER AND HIS DAUGHTER.

"In Heaven's name who are you, boy?" yelled the man as Madge sprung on board the sloop, and walked aft, allowing her skiff to drop astern.

"Father, I am Madge, and I wish to speak with you before the cutter returns."

"Madge! what does this mean, that you come in the attire of a man?" and Captain Vernon spoke sternly.

"I can explain nothing now, for I have not time; but I am known on yonder vessel-of-war as Nat, the brother of Madge, and I acted as her pilot out to sea, going on board of her in this disguise to avoid returning as my proper self; but why did you call the cutter back?"

"Curses! I did not do it, and he who did is—"

The man paused suddenly, and Madge asked:

"Is who?"

"A fellow I shipped in Portland, and who went mad, for he sprung overboard as soon as he saw the cutter put about."

"Oh, father! can he not be saved?" and Madge glanced over the dark waters.

"No, for he went to the bottom like a rock; but here comes the cutter, and what am I to do about it?" and Captain Vernon seemed strangely uneasy.

"I will hail Captain Maynard and tell him you did not see the skiff, and did not know what to do after he had signaled you to come to."

"Yes, yes! that is it, so do so, Madge," eagerly said the skipper.

"You seem strangely excited, father; but remember, should they board us, I am your son, Nat."

"Yes, I won't forget; but hark!"

"Ho the sloop!" came in Lieutenant Maynard's voice, as the cutter drew near.

"Ahoy the Scorpion!" returned Madge.

"Ho, Nat, that is your voice, and you got aboard all right; but what is wanted?"

"My father didn't see ther skiff comin', sir, and didn't know what you wanted ter do, so hailed yer."

"Ay, ay, I am glad that nothing is wrong, for I saw your men forward acting as though in mutiny."

"Oh no, sir; they got excited, for they are not cutter's men."

"Well, Nat, I will say good-by again, and I'll not forget the middy's warrant for you."

"Skipper, you have a fine boy there, and I wish him to enter the service, for he'll make his mark on a quarter-deck."

"Thank you, sir; Nat's a good boy and a brave one," answered Captain Vernon, and the two vessels were too far off for further conversation.

"Now, we'll head homeward, Madge, and when the sloop is on her course once more, I'll listen to your explanation," said the skipper.

"I'll tell you all, father, and I think there is an explanation due me, too."

"What do you mean?"

"I thought you only carried two men on the sloop, sir."

"Well, so I do."

"And yet I saw half a score forward, and they were also seen on board the cutter—a large crew, father, for a thirty-ton sloop."

"Madge, do you question your father's actions?"

"But wait until we are under way, and I think I can offer a far better excuse for my large crew than you can for your conduct, for it pains me to see you in the garb of a man," and going forward skipper Vernon gave some orders in a low tone, while Madge took the helm, and the men came out of the hold, a dozen in number, and took their places, while the Blue Bell went bounding on her way once more.

At the helm now sat skipper Vernon, the

light from the cabin falling full upon him, while Madge crouched in the cockpit.

Forward the men were grouped together, talking in a low tone.

The wind was fresh, blowing a ten-knot breeze, and the sloop sped along with the sea parting from her sharp bows.

She was a trim craft of thirty tons, with a raking mast running far heavenward for so small a hull, and a bowsprit that projected far out over the bows.

Her boom and gaff were also very long, and the sail she spread was enough for a yacht in a race, or a vessel of double her tonnage.

The hull was long, with narrow bows and stem, and considerable width just aft of amidships.

She certainly was a stanch, swift craft, with considerable depth of hold and large carrying capacity.

The cabin lamp revealed all within distinctly.

A neat carpet was upon the floor, two berths with curtains drawn across them were upon either side, and then there was a table, a shelf of books, a few marine pictures, drawings and paintings, in carved frames, and a desk with writing materials thereon.

A door opened into a narrow gangway running forward, but this was closed and barred.

The pretty craft had been built on a model of her skipper's, and Madge had given her the name Blue Bell, from the fact that she had a bouquet of blue bells in her hand the day she first went on board the craft when her father brought her home.

She had also worked a flag for her, a blue bell in a violet field.

As the lamp's rays fell upon skipper Vernon, while he sat at the helm, they revealed his face and form distinctly.

He possessed a tall, well-knit frame, with broad shoulders, and he was dressed in a kind of undress uniform such as officers of the navy wore at that time.

His head set well upon his shoulders, was carried somewhat haughtily, and his bearing proud and upright.

His face was a study. It was full of strength, every feature being thoroughly marked with power and intelligence of a high order.

He appeared to be a man of fifty, and yet might be younger, or older by half a score of years, which, it was hard to tell.

His face was now pale and very stern, but he was calm and cold as he said:

"Now Madge, let me hear all that you have to say in explanation of my finding you in male attire."

"The story is soon told, father, and I do not think you will accuse me of committing any great crime when I tell you all," she answered, in an injured tone.

"I do not now accuse you, Madge, but I cannot understand it."

"The explanation you shall know," was the reply, and Madge told the story from her race up the river with the packet schooner to her changing her costume, after what she heard in the cabin and running the cutter out to sea.

"Madge, my brave girl, you have acted nobly, and just as might have been expected of you."

"I heard of this charge against Noel Brandon before leaving port, but could not believe it, from what I know of him as a boy, and, if he is innocent, he can prove it, and doubtless will do so, if he is not hunted down and hanged before he gets a chance."

"Where did you say that he was?"

"I said that when I found out that it was known he was at the Hermit Sailor's, I told Silly Sam to go there and aid him to seek a place elsewhere."

It must be admitted that just here Madge kept her own counsel as to where Noel Brandon was in hiding, for she did not wish to tell even her father.

"Well, Sam will take care of him, I am sure, for if he is called an idiot he has more sense than half of those who so call him."

"Now, Madge, I must urge you to be more careful of yourself, for you have placed yourself in danger several times, by your own confession, and, as I will be much away after this, I wish you to take care of yourself."

"I must speak to Philip and Phillis, that they may keep a closer eye upon you."

"No, father, I do not need watching, and I am not one to run needlessly into danger; but what will call you away more in the future than in the past?"

"My business affairs are increasing, Madge, and I intend to extend my voyages."

"I have the little sloop at home in the harbor, which Cass Kenedy told me was my prize, and I was in hopes you would find it large enough for your use, for you remember, father, one of five tons was all you had when you came here, and the Prize is ten tons."

"Yes, and now I have the Blue Bell of thirty tons, and she is not large enough for my increasing trade."

"Father, you know, as I do, that unkind things are said of you along the coast."

"Yes, men call me a smuggler, Madge."

"Yes, father, and Lieutenant Maynard was

told up in the village to look out for the Blue Bell; but when we sighted you, and I told him it was your vessel, he said no more, only that people would go ship.

"But, father, I distinctly saw that man signal the cutter, and heard his words, and you drag him down into the cabin.

"Then I saw you come on deck, and you held a large object in your arms, and you dropped it overboard.

"What does it mean, father, when added to the fact, that instead of three, as I supposed, you have a dozen men in crew, and I noticed that they were armed and went below when the cutter put back.

"Father, dare I believe the stories about you?" and Madge laid her hand upon his arm and looked earnestly into his face, as she arose and stood by his side.

A quiver seemed to pass over the strong, handsome face of the skipper, and Madge continued:

"Father, I know there are temptations to do wrong, for money can be made by breaking the laws of our land.

"I know that we were very poor when we came to the Kennebec, for, though I was young, I know you had only one sloop, Philip and Phillis, what we had on board, and a few hundred dollars.

"Now, father, you seem to be rich, for you have given me fine clothes, jewelry, and all my heart could desire, yet our home is plain, while we live like aristocrats.

"Father, what does it all mean, again I ask you?"

Again the quiver passed over the stern face, and Captain Vernon was very pale; but with a light laugh, he said:

"My child, it just shows how appearances are so often deceptive.

"I came to the Kennebec a poor man, yes; but I struck a lucrative run with my little sloop, and money was made rapidly, and instead of building a fine mansion like Brandon Hall, and buying thousands of acres, I have been content to live in our snug little home, get a few comforts around us, and spend my money on ourselves, and give to you what it was a pleasure to give, and all of which you are most deserving of.

"Fortunately, having an education myself, I have been able to teach you, so that you would not grow up in ignorance, and the few weeks I have given you each year in the cities, have enabled you to learn music and see something of the world, so that to-day, though you are as good a sailor as is on this coast, and a better pilot; though you can ride like a Mexican, win all the prizes at rifle-shooting at the barbecue, and can fence like a master of the sword, you still are an accomplished lady."

"But, father, you talk of poor little me, and not of yourself."

"What shall I say of myself?"

"Tell me about these men on board—that man who signaled the cutter, and—"

"Madge, now I must tell you a secret."

"Yes, father."

"On our run out we came upon a wreck, a vessel that had been dismasted in a storm, and was sinking.

"Upon her decks were her captain and crew, fifteen in all, and I stood down to them and took them off."

"The captain had a bundle of luggage he seemed anxious to save, it being all that he had time to get off of the wreck before she went down.

"This bundle I put in my cabin, and gave the men quarters forward, the captain going with me."

"Then he told me just who he was; that he was a smuggler, and asked me to land him at a certain point upon the coast, from whence he could make his way in a boat to his retreat.

"Picking him and his crew up as I did, I could not do otherwise, for I would not deliver smugglers up who were wrecked, and thus take blood-money, there being a price upon them."

"Certainly you could not, father."

"So I promised to land him, as he had asked, and then he told me that there was one of his crew who was a traitor, and we must watch him."

"This man I ordered aft, to stay in the cabin, and made him take his trick at the helm."

"We have had rough weather of late, and I was worn out, so went to sleep, ordering them not to call me until we were near shore, and I was awakened by the sloop laying to."

"I heard the voice of the man hailing the cutter, and it was the traitor smuggler, so I hastily dragged him below."

"The smuggler captain then ran into the cabin and feeling that the fellow had betrayed us, for the capture of the sloop meant their death, he struck the traitor down with his sword, and in sheer fright the wounded wretch sprung up the companionway into the sea, while I, knowing that the bundle brought on board by the outlaws, contained rich laces and other smuggled goods, took it upon deck and quickly dropped it overboard."

"Now, Madge, you know the circumstances that caused you to look with suspicion upon your father."

"Forgive me, father; but these smugglers?"

"I shall land them, as I promised, and certainly I did not wish the cutter men to see a large crew on board, so ordered them below."

"I understand all now, father—but look out for Foamcrest Rock, for your bows are almost upon it."

"You are right, Madge, and I had forgotten I held the helm even," and the bows swept swiftly away from the danger, while Captain Vernon said:

"Take the tiller, Madge, while I go forward and see just where those men wish me to land them," and leaving Madge at the helm the skipper went forward and joined the group of men standing there.

Soon he returned, and said:

"They wish me to land them a league down the coast."

"I'll go with you, father."

"No, Madge, you take your skiff, as we round Spear Rock, and go home, so as to welcome me in petticoats and not breeches upon my coming, and have Phillis get me a good breakfast, too, for I am very hungry."

Ten minutes after Madge was in her skiff flying shoreward, while the sloop held on up the coast, gliding in among the reefs, rocks and islands in a way that showed an experienced hand was at the helm.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MYSTIC COVE.

THE small sheet of water bearing the name of the Mystic Cove was one of Nature's freaks, and the appellation was certainly an appropriate one.

To the observer, even the close observer, going along the shores, a rugged wall of rock only was presented to the eye, with seemingly natural breaks here and there.

To row to the base of this rocky cliff, was to find indentures here and another there, but they seemed not to extend far, simply being fissures in the rock.

Following one however, by pushing with the hands against the rocky sides, for it was not wide enough for the use of oars, a boat would wind in and out, still going further inland, until it came out into a small basin, perhaps an acre in size.

This was the Mystic Cove, its depths being almost unfathomable, and its sides appearing as precipitous cliffs rising high into the air, and the summit crowned with a fringe of pines.

Again was the eye deceived here, for, upon crossing the cove, or basin, to the other side, a foothold was obtainable upon the rocky cliff, and a small crevice penetrated into the seemingly solid rock.

The crevice was not two feet in width, and looked like a huge split, but beyond it was visible daylight, showing that the cliff there was not as thick as it looked.

Following this for a few yards, one came to an opening like a well, only some thirty feet in diameter, and in the rock before them was a cavern entrance.

This cavern did not penetrate far, was simply but two rock chambers, dry, airy and by no means uncomfortable.

The well-like pit that penetrated the rock, to the distance of nearly eighty feet, had its edges at the summit fringed with pines, so that a more weird, secluded and safe hiding-place could not be readily found.

This place Madge had one day found in her wanderings, and the secret she had kept to herself for a long time.

One day, however, Silly Sam had walked down the village to see her, and she had determined to take him back in her skiff.

On the way a fearful storm sprung up, and there being no landing on the shore for her skiff, Madge had run into the channel leading to the Mystic Cove, as she had named it, and to seek shelter from the drenching rain, had crossed the basin and led the way to the cave.

"Don't you tell, Sam," she had said to the amazed youth.

"No, I won't tell, if you don't want me to, Miss Madge; but what a place it is for smugglers, if they only knew it," was Sam's practical way of looking at the discovery of Madge.

When the rain storm blew over, Madge took Sam on his way to the village, and never had she heard anything to show that he had betrayed her secret.

It was therefore to this retreat that Silly Sam had been directed by Madge to carry Noel Brandon.

Sam had not forgotten the way into the cove, and readily went there, with his skiff, the discovery greatly surprising the young sailor.

Once in the cave Sam lighted a ship's lantern, and taking some bundles from the lockers stepped out upon the rock and sought the cavern, bidding Noel Brandon to await his return.

The bundles that he had brought were blankets, a couple of pillows, and other things to make the wounded man comfortable, while he also had a basket of edibles along.

By the light of the lantern he selected a good spot for the bed, and hastily spread it upon the rocky floor.

Then he took up his lantern and returned to the boat.

"I'm ready, Master Noel, and though this haint ther Flag Ship Inn, it is safer," he said, as he tenderly aided Noel Brandon on his way to the cavern.

"This is a remarkable place, Sam," said the young sailor, glancing around him.

"So it is, and nobody but Madcap Madge would have found it; but you must never tell, for it's her secret, and she told me to bring you here, so you would be safe."

"God bless her; but you have made me most comfortable, Sam."

"She told me what to do, and she got a basket of victuals in the boat yet."

The basket was then brought, and after making the wounded man as comfortable as he could, Silly Sam told him he would come again the next night, and see what Madge had decided to do.

"I will owe my life to you and that sweet girl, Sam," said Noel Brandon with a tremor in his voice.

"I'm but doin' as she tells me, Master Noel; but now I must be off, so as to get home before daybreak," and Silly Sam started upon his return to the village leaving Noel Brandon alone in the cavern of the Mystic Cove—alone with his conscience, a bitter thing indeed for a wicked man to have as a companion.

Weakened by his loss of blood from his wound and his exertions, Silly Sam rowed with an effort, and his boat went slowly along.

Suffering as he was, he paid no heed to aught else than getting home, and failed to see a boat near.

The occupant had rested upon his oars at seeing his approach, and then had rowed rapidly back toward the village.

As Sam landed and made his boat fast, the man stood eying him from the shadow of a house, and muttered, as he walked on up into the village:

"That is Silly Sam, and he it is who carried Brandon from the hermit's cabin, for, wounded as he was, he could never have gone alone.

"Aha! I am on the track, and now to watch Silly Sam, and I find Noel Brandon."

As the man spoke he returned to his boat, and sped rapidly away, heading across the river.

The man was Darke Darrell.

CHAPTER XIX.

JOYCE MAKES A VISIT.

IT was dawn when Captain Vernon came up to his cottage.

He had left his sloop in the harbor below, and but two men were visible upon the decks.

Madge sat in a large easy-chair upon the little porch, fast asleep.

Human nature had claimed the needed rest, and she had dropped into a peaceful slumber, while awaiting the coming of her father.

Old Phillis had built a fire, and had all ready for breakfast for her master, and she too had gone to sleep, her head upon her arm, her arm upon the window sill, while Philip, who had gone out to the little stable to feed the ponies, was fast asleep in the hay.

The fact is, the negro couple had been anxious about Madge the past few nights, and had lost much-needed rest.

"Well, Madge, fast asleep I see," said Captain Vernon as he drew near, and in an instant he was on her feet, while Phillis, awakened by her master's voice, began to fly around the kitchen to make up for lost time.

Something in the air seemed to arouse old Philip, and he began to whistle away at his work, as though slumber was foreign to his nature.

In the trees the birds began to trill their matin songs, the wind blew briskly, and sighed through the pines, the roosters crowed good-morning, and all nature, human and brute, were awake.

"Father, I am so glad to see you home, for I had such a fearful dream about you," cried Madge, kissing him affectionately, while she shuddered at the remembrance of what she had been dreaming.

"A bad dream, and about me, Madge?"

"Yes, father. I saw you a prisoner, in heavy irons, and you were doomed to death as a pirate."

"You were to be hung at the yard-arm, when suddenly a man came forward and stayed the execution."

"That man was Noel Brandon, father."

The stern face of the skipper did not move a muscle at this, but he said:

"You have been overtaxing yourself of late, Madge, and seeing those smugglers on my sloop caused you to have pirates in your mind."

"I was not born to be hanged, and Noel Brandon, a fugitive himself from the gallows, would hardly be able to save me."

"Come, let us go in and see what Phillis has for us in the way of breakfast, and then you must seek your room and rest."

"But 'e crew, father?"

"I landed them, as they desired, and only just returned."

"You do not go out soon again?"

The Sea Fugitive.

"Yes, within a couple of days."

"Then you can take Mr. Brandon to some port."

"Yes, wherever he would like to go."

"Then that is settled, and I feel better over it."

"Madge, what is this man to you?" and the skipper looked fixedly into the face of his daughter.

"Father, he saved my life, as you know, and I wish to repay the debt," and her face did not change color, though she saw by her father's look and manner that he held a suspicion that she cared for Noel Brandon.

But her manner reassured him, as he said:

"Well, Madge, I do not wish you to lose your heart, especially to one who is a fugitive from the law, for a crime he is accused of committing."

"Some day you will meet a noble man, one worthy of you, and you can become his wife."

"Father, I do not wish to marry, and I am too young to think of such things."

"But here comes I'phillis!"

As she spoke, old I'phillis appeared, her face all smiles.

"Lordy, massa, I is awful glad ter see yer back again, fer we was anxious about yer, as ye stayed so long."

"Yer hain't looking jist right neither, fer yer looks pale."

"Does yer feel pale, massa?"

"I feel so hungry, I'phillis, you'll turn pale to see me eat."

"Is breakfast ready?"

"Yas, massa, and I has br'iled bird, hoe-cakes, coffee, milk, mussels and fish fer yer, sah."

"A good breakfast indeed, I'phillis, and I'll do ample justice to your good cooking, which I sadly miss when I am away from home."

"I'll have to take you as cook on the Blue Bell."

"No, sah! I'll cook on shore, but no more salt water sailin' for dis old nigger."

"I hain't fergot our comin' here, sah, and if I goes from here I walks, I does," and I'phillis led the way into the cosy little breakfast-room, where the skipper did indeed do full justice to the meal before him, while Madge also ate with that relish that comes of a hearty appetite which perfect health and a clear conscience gives one.

After breakfast Madge took a nap of a few hours, and arose refreshed, just as some one dashed up to the cottage on horseback.

It was Joyce Brandon, and dismounting, she entered the cottage as Madge called out to her to do.

The aristocratic maiden seemed surprised at the air of refinement and appearance of almost luxury about the place.

"Whose is that little work of art, Madge?" she asked, pointing to a pretty marine painting.

"That is mine."

"Do you mean that you are the artist?"

"I am the painter, but I do not claim to be an artist; and I painted it as a companion piece to that one of my father's," pointing to another painting.

"Your father painted that?"

"Yes."

"Then he, too, is an artist?"

"Father is a genius, I think, for he paints, is a fine musician, sings well, and is certainly a fine sailor."

"And he is content to be a skipper on a small sloop, while you, competent to shine in any society, hide yourself away here on this desolate coast."

"We are happy; and besides, father is not a rich man, though he once was, I believe; but have you met him?"

"No."

"Here he comes, and I would like to present him to you."

"With pleasure," and the beauty and heiress turned a curious look upon the skipper as he approached, carrying a pair of oars upon his shoulder.

The tall, erect form, superb carriage, and stern, refined face of the man surprised her.

His dress, too, smacked of the quarter-deck of a man-of-war, rather than of a coaster, and his face was stern but handsome withal, and attractive.

He did not look by daylight as old as he had in the glare of the cabin lamp.

These, then, were the people whom Joyce Brandon had been taught to regard as of the common herd.

Seeing Joyce, Captain Brandon doffed his cap and bent low, as Madge said:

"Miss Brandon, permit me to present to you my father, Skipper Vernon, of the sloop Blue Bell."

Joyce held out her hand, and said frankly:

"I am glad to meet you, Captain Vernon, and I surely wish I had known your lovely daughter long ago, for we have become fast friends."

"It gives me pleasure to meet you, Miss Brandon and to hear you speak well of my daughter; but she deserves all that can be said in her praise."

"Will you not dismount and join us at our dinner, for I assure you we have an excellent

cook, and I have some Burgundy that would not disgrace your father's table!"

"Yes, do stay, Joyce," urged Madge, and with courtly grace Captain Vernon offered his arm to the fair visitor and led the way into the dining-room.

"Golly! dis here seems like old times, Phil, and I does hopes our folkses is gwine ter git inter society," said Phillis, as she bustled around in serving the table.

"Yes, old gal, I hopes they'll git back inter society and ther church, fer we is gitting ter be heathen folkses sart'in," averred Philip, draining a Burgundy bottle which Phillis had just removed from the table.

That Joyce never enjoyed a meal more in her life, she frankly confessed, and as Captain Vernon returned to his sloop, Madge came in from the kitchen with a large basket of edibles and beckoned to her guest to come.

"Where?"

"Do you not wish to see your brother?"

"Oh! if I only could."

"You can, for he removed in safety last night from where he was concealed, and is now but a fugitive from here, and where no one could find him."

"And you are going there?"

"Yes, for I wish to take him these provisions and see if he needs aught else, so come with me, for we'll take my skiff and soon row there," and an hour after the skiff went slowly into the Mystic Cove, to the great amazement of Joyce Brandon.

CHAPTER XX.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

JOYCE BRANDON, the proud, aristocratic beauty, seemed to feel a kind of awe for Madcap Madge, the skipper's daughter, for she did things that few men dare do, and withal was as serenely lovely as a society belle.

Madge had told her of the part she had played as Nat, and Joyce wondered how she dared do it, but said:

"You are different from any one I ever knew, Madge, and if I was a man, I would be desperately in love with you."

"Circumstances have made me what I am, Joyce, for I have had the training of a boy, as well as the schooling of a girl, and half the time I feel better able to cope with desperate danger than to bear the petty worries that fall to the lot of women."

"But here we are in the cove, and you can go on alone to the cavern, and I will follow you soon, with the things I have in the boat."

"Be careful, for the footing is not sure on that rock."

Joyce sprung ashore, went through the crevice, and a moment after came out into the well-like space before the cavern.

She saw her brother, reclining upon his rude bed, a book in his hand, a cigar between his teeth.

"Brother!"

Noel Brandon started, half arose, and turning his head beheld his sister.

"Joyce! my sister! you here?"

She sprung forward, dropped upon her knees by his side, and throwing her arms about his neck burst into tears.

"Oh Noel, my poor, wretched brother!" she gasped.

"My dear sister, it was kind of you to seek me here; but tell me, do you believe me guilty of the double crime I am accused of?"

"I do not."

"Thank God for that—I can rest more content now; but our parents?"

"They know not what to think, but hope, and are glad you were not captured."

"So am I, for I have a chance for my life, which otherwise I would not have had, and I owe it to that noble girl, Madcap Madge, as they call her in the village."

"You do, and she will aid you to escape, I know, for she is with me now, and will soon be here; but how is your wound, brother?"

"Painful, yet improving, and I hope before very long to be able to walk, but now, as it is, I am almost as helpless as an infant; but does father know where I am?"

"No indeed, for his pride is such, that were strong proof of your guilt brought to him, he would not save you from the gallows if he could do so, and mother would do as he says."

"I left the village yesterday, and Madge told me to ride down to her cottage to-day for news, for she thwarted the act of some man who meant to betray you last night."

"Was the attempt made?"

"Madge says that it was, and failed; but she was very reticent upon the subject, and I did not urge her to say more."

"I took dinner with the Vernons to-day, Noel, and the captain is a most remarkable man."

"He is indeed, for I met him years ago; but he is a man to fear I think, and rumor has it that he is a smuggler."

"I do not believe all I hear, Noel, and he scouted the idea of your being guilty."

"He was generous toward me; but, wild as I have been, men cannot say that I have been wicked or dishonorable: but some one comes—"

"It is Madge!"

The next moment Madge came in sight, and greeted Noel Brandon pleasantly, but with a certain restraint.

She did not see, or appeared not to do so, his outstretched hand, and busied herself in fixing the things she had brought within easy reach.

"Now, Lieutenant Brandon—"

"I am plain mister, Miss Madge, or Noel, at your service."

"Well, Mr. Brandon, I have a bottle of medicine here my father, who understands medicine, prepared for your wound, and I am to dress it for you and then you are to keep the bandages moist with it."

"But, Miss Madge, I can dress the wound."

"There is no need of any nonsense, Mr. Brandon, for you are my patient, and I have had some experience with wounds."

"Here, I will dress the wound and your sweet sister will aid me."

She spoke in a manner that allowed of no resistance, and rolling up the leg of his pantaloons, she removed the bandages, carefully bathed the wound, applied fresh wraps, wet with the healing ointment, and then said:

"Now you can enjoy the meal I have brought you, and here are several books."

"And how long is this to last, Miss Vernon, that I am to be a tax upon your kindness of heart?" he asked sadly.

"Until you are able to walk, or at least are much better, when my father will take you to any port you may desire to enter."

"I thank you."

"I will owe to you my life, Miss Madge."

"Wait until you are out of danger; you are not, even here; but I must be off, and will see you daily, and should I not come, Silly Sam will," and with a pleasant nod Madcap Madge walked away.

Joyce remained a moment longer, and promising to see her brother as soon as she could again, she followed Madge, and the two returned in the skiff to the home of the Vernons.

There Joyce mounted her horse, after a warm farewell to Madge, and rode rapidly homeward, for already the shadows of approaching night were falling upon the sea and shore, and the maiden cared not to be in the somber forest after dark.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PLOTTER.

THE widow Darrell wore an anxious heart, when she found how much away from home he was, immediately after his return; but then she saw that he was not touching anything to drink, came home perfectly sober, and he gave as an excuse that he was trying to buy a vessel, and wished to see all that passed into the river, and so she felt relieved.

After his failure to capture Noel Brandon, as he had said he would do, Darke Darrell felt considerably cut, for he saw that he was doubted by Lieutenant Maynard.

He however set to work to carry out his plot in his own way, for knowing as he really did, that Madcap Madge had carried the wounded sailor to the hut of the hermit, he felt confident that he could not be far away.

Going into the village, after parting with the young officer, he had spent his money freely, to get the tongues of the gossips to work, though he drank nothing himself.

Recognized by those who had known him five years before, and having apparently plenty of money, he was warmly welcomed by the hang-ers-on at the inn, and he soon discovered that the feeling was in favor of Noel Brandon.

He also found out that Silly Sam was the young aristocrat's best friend, and was laid up at home with a wound.

Madge was also the talk of the village, after her brave act in coming to the rescue; and the girl was discussed in all her wild scrapes, but always in tones of deepest respect.

Cass Kennedy, the young constable, strolled into the tap-room and discovered Darke Darrell.

He saw that he was a stranger, asked who he was, remembered then many acts of his early life, and determined to keep an eye upon him, as he muttered:

"I have heard that he turned pirate, and he certainly spends his money freely, for no one else is paying the scores of that thirsty crowd of soakers."

"He does not even drink ale, I see; he has some little game to play, for without being drunk no honest tar would throw away several months' pay as he is doing."

From his point of observation he studied the face and form of Darrell until he seemed to have it thoroughly engraved upon his mind, and then he leisurely strolled over and joined the crowd.

Darke Darrell's quick eyes fell upon him, and he saw that the young constable was no ordinary man.

"Come, mate, join us in a drink," he said, wishing to know just who he was, for his face he did not recall as having before seen.

"I do not drink, sir, but I thank you," was the quiet reply, and a bush fell upon the crowd of bummers, for they all stood in certain awe of the young officer.

"Nor do I; but I have just come home, after years of absence, and am spending a few shil-

lings on the boys for auld lang syne's sake, and I'd order you a bottle of Buntline's best if you will have it."

"I have no claim upon you, sir, that you should spend your money upon me, and these men should be ashamed to allow a sailor to spend his hard-earned money upon them; but it is none of my business how you throw your gold away," and Cass Kenedy wheeled on his heel and walked away, leaving an uncomfortable feeling upon Darke Darrell and the others.

But one of the crowd had caught a look of the constable, and soon followed him out.

He was a sad-looking specimen of humanity, for drink had marred his once fine face, and his clothing was in tatters.

It was not often that he had had such a chance to "fill up" at another's expense as on that night, and he had religiously devoted himself to the pleasing task of seeing how much he could hold.

He was not maudling drunk, however, though approaching that stage, and he had seen the look of the constable, and understood it.

He went out of the inn, and found Cass Kenedy awaiting him.

"Well, Tap-room Tom, you are in luck to-night," said Kenedy, looking with contempt upon the man.

"Constable, the gent is a gentleman."

"Yes, any one is a gentleman who would treat you to liquor; but I thought you intended stopping this hard drinking?"

"It isn't hard drinkin', Cass, it's easy drinkin', easiest thing in the world."

"Yes, to make a sot and fool of yourself; but tell me, Tom, what has the gentleman asked you?"

"To drink."

"That is very evident; but what has he gotten you drunkards to talk about?"

"Everything and anything."

"I am glad that your knowledge is so vast; but think what has been the main topic of conversation!"

"I cannot think."

"Then you'll regret it, for I was going to give you a dollar or two to make you solid with the gentleman by treating him."

"Oh, give me the money, Cass," pleaded the sot.

"Not until I know just what that man was treating you all for."

"I don't know, but I was drinking all the same."

"He asked us about Madcap Madge, then of the Lieutenant Brandon, his home, sister, and such, and then wanted to know who was Master Noel's shipmate here in the village."

"Ah! anything else?"

"Well, we told him Silly Sam and Captain Buntline were his friends, though we all liked the lieutenant."

"Anything else, Tom?"

"Well, he asked us if it was easy to get a crew here for a voyage?"

"Well, Tom, here is the money I promised you, so go in and see what more the man asks you and be sure to let me know."

"And mind you, don't drink any more, unless you wish to go to the jail for a week or two to sober up."

"I'll only get one or more to balance up constable," and taking the money Tap-room Tom hastened away, depositing the silver in some out of the way pocket, for he had not the remotest idea of spending it on any one else than himself.

But the talk with the constable set Tap-room Tom to thinking, and getting near to Darke Darrell he said in a meaning way:

"Want see you when you leave here—somethin's up."

Darke Darrell nodded, called for drinks around once more and said:

"Then mates I must leave you, for I have an old mother anxiously awaiting me at home."

The drinks were served and paid for, and then Darke Darrell left the inn and close on his heels followed Tap-room Tom.

"Well, what did you mean?" asked Darrell, turning upon the man who followed him, when they were a short distance from the inn.

"Cass Kenedy's got his eye on you."

"And who is Cass Kenedy?"

"The constable."

"Oh!"

"That's what he is."

"And who are you?"

"A loafer."

"What do you do?"

"Drink."

"Well, what about this constable?"

"He asked me about you?"

"Ab, he did?"

"He did, did he."

"Well?"

"You knows best if it is well."

"You think I have cause to fear him?"

"Any man has who hain't square clean through."

"Do you think he is tracking me?"

"He is."

"Well, I am glad you warned me, though I have done nothing for him to watch me."

"Was he the tall, fine-looking fellow whom I asked to drink and who refused?"

"That was Cass."

"Well, you watch him for me and let me know, when next I come to the hotel, what he means."

"I can't live on air."

"Ah! you need money?"

"Who don't?"

"You'll get drunk with it."

"I'm drunk now, boilin' over, but I don't git no drunker."

"Well, here is an English sovereign for you, and I'll match it if you give me valuable news."

"Now tell me if I could get a couple of good men here."

"What to do?"

"Go to sea."

"I'm one."

"You won't do, for the salt water air would kill you."

"I want good sailors."

"They can be found."

"Men I can trust."

"One man must take his chances in trustin' another."

"True; but do you know two such men?"

"I does."

"And can get them for me?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Call it to-morrow night when you come to the inn."

"All right."

"But I must eat."

"I gave you a sovereign."

"That's for drinks."

"Here is another, now fail me if you dare."

"I'll never fail, unless I gets sober and forgits what we has said," and Tap-room Tom walked off congratulating himself on his good luck, for he never had picked up so much money in so short a while before.

Darke Darrell meanwhile took his boat and started upon his return home, when the reader will remember that he saw Silly Sam coming up the river, and discovering who he was felt assured that he was on the right path to discover the hiding-place of Noel Brandon.

With hope in his breast he started upon his way home, his brain full of a plot for mischief, while he felt a trifle uneasy at the fact that Cass Kenedy the constable was watching him closely.

CHAPTER XXII.

DOGGED.

AFTER reporting at home to his waiting mother, and having a short chat with her he bade her good-night and retired to his room, while she, with her son safe beneath the roof at once sought rest and dropped off into deep slumber.

Then Darke Darrell sprung lightly out of his window, went to the shore, sprung into a skiff with a sail, and went flying down the river.

Approaching the other shore at a point not far from the Vernon haven, he lowered sail and took to his oars.

Cautiously he rowed into the little harbor, keeping under the shadow of the land, and then rested upon his oars.

In the haven was the Blue Bell, lying about the center.

Then he saw the pretty yachtlike craft which Madcap Madge had captured from him, and it lay close within shore.

A yawl, several skiffs, and a smack on the shore also caught his eye.

Then he cautiously approached the small craft which he bought in Boston to aid him in his plot to rob Noel Brandon.

A dim light was visible on the Blue Bell, but the smaller sloop was all darkness.

"Yes, no one is on board of her, and she can be readily cut out."

"I would rather get more men and take the large sloop, for she would be more useful, and bring more money when I sell; but her crew sleeps on board and I will take no chances."

"As it is I must prevent the big craft following me when I run out, for she looks to go well."

So saying he rowed slowly out of the little harbor and once in open water hoisted sail and stood back homeward.

It was just dawn when he arrived; but he gained his room unseen and was soon fast asleep.

Not caring to go to the village by day, and come under the eye of the constable, Darke Darrell remained about home, idling away his time.

Sweeping the waters with his glass he saw below him a skiff.

It held two occupants and made for a certain part of the shore, where suddenly it disappeared.

"That is strange, for I know of no opening there."

"Can the skiff have sunk?" he said to himself.

For a long time he watched, trying to account for the strange circumstance of a skiff disappearing within what appeared to be a solid rock, and keeping his powerful glass at his eye, he suddenly saw the boat reappear.

"Aha! there is an opening there, after all, and there in that boat are women."

"The Madcap, of course, is one, and who is the other?"

"That I must find out," and he went down to his boat and, springing in, pulled rapidly for the cliff.

Darke Darrell knew the river well.

He had fished along its shores from his earliest boyhood, and his father had been captain of a coaster running to Boston, and many a cruise had the youth made with him.

But his seeing a skiff go into the cliff and disappear, puzzled him.

True, he was a long way off, and might be mistaken, but he did not think so, and hence he went to investigate.

He reached the cliff, examined its side closely, drew nearer, and at last discovered the opening.

"Aha! now I have a mystery," he said, and into the channelway he forced his boat.

To his surprise he came out in the Mystic Cove.

It was the very place for a safe retreat, he knew.

Slowly he pulled around it, came to the rock where a landing had been made to reach the cave, and here lay a white kerchief.

"Well, the plot thickens—B is the initial embroidered on this bit of linen.

"B stands for Brandon, and Noel Brandon has a sister, and there were two girls in that boat."

"I see! I see!"

Slowly he got out upon the rock, and going forward, his eyes fell upon the crevice in the wall.

Then he paused, for suddenly he heard a voice.

It was raised in song, singing a sailor glee of a century ago.

"That is Noel Brandon's voice, and I have found him," and the man fairly trembled with delight.

Slowly he retraced his way to his boat, muttering:

"Well, he's got nerve, for he takes his imprisonment and his sufferings coolly, but that's just like him."

"Now, Noel Brandon, though I missed getting the handsome sum you won at the gambling table, I'll make the Government pay a like amount for your body, and I'll not have to divide it, either, for my pals are dead, and the men I need now I'll simply hire."

"Now to return home to supper, and then to go to the village and see what kind of men that drunken vagabond has secured for me."

"What I do I must do at once, and it will be no small task to get the sloop, rescue the prisoner, and run out before dawn; but I must do it, cost what it may."

With a swift stroke he sent his skiff flying homeward; his supper was waiting and hastily eaten, and telling his mother he expected to go to Boston to buy a craft, and take the packet out that evening, he bade her farewell.

The poor woman stood gazing after him, the tears streaming down her cheeks, and until the sun set and the shadows fell, she did not move from her point of observation.

As he sailed up toward the village he would glance astern and see her standing there, and it made him nervous.

"Curses on it! she watches me as a witch might, and they say it brings bad luck to be watched out of sight."

Again he looked, and still the form remained, growing fainter in the distance.

"Why don't she go in?" he said savagely.

Again he looked astern; the twilight was deepening, but he could indistinctly see his mother still watching.

"She'll give me bad luck, I'm sure."

"I'm a man, and why can't she let me take care of myself, without watching me as if I was a boy?"

And so the man raved on, his heart unable to see the depths of a mother's love, even when bestowed upon so unworthy an object.

It was just dark when he landed at the village pier.

There stood Tap-room Tom awaiting him.

"Well, my man, are you sober yet?"

"Heaven forbid! I would not dare allow myself to get sober, for I'd get the terrors."

"You look as if you had 'em now; but what about the two men I wanted?"

"I has 'em."

"Where?"

"I'll produce 'em on demand."

"Are they good men?"

The Sea Fugitive.

"Ah! how old are they?"

"I don't dare say they are old men, for they be pretty nigh the years I have counted."

"You look about ninety."

"I feel a trifle more when I don't get rum; but I'm not old in years, if I am in wickedness, for I count just two-score."

"You'll never see another half-score."

"Guess not, nor half that will it be before the daises blossom over me, for I'm fast drinkin' the life out o' me."

"But rum's got the whip hand now, and all I ask is to pass my remaining years with a skin full and to die drunk, for I darn't get sober."

"Rum is your god, fellow."

"Yes, and the devil is your master, so we are even."

"Now you want your men?"

"Yes."

"They want thirty dollars the month and found, and as much if it's only for the cruise, be it short."

"I'll give them fifty each for the cruise, if they are good men."

"Done; now I want pay for my services."

"I paid you last night."

"To find you the men?"

"Yes."

"Well, I found 'em."

"And what more?"

"Now I want a couple of sovereigns to deliver the goods."

"You are an infernal old beat."

"I believe I am; but where'll I get rum if I don't have money?"

"Bring me the men here and I'll pay you the two sovereigns."

"I'll be back in half an hour, and you wait here, for Cass is wide awake, I can tell you."

"The constable?"

"Yes."

"All right, I'll wait here, and tell the men to come prepared to sail at once."

"Where's your craft?"

"That is none of your business!"

"I guess you is right; but the packet will be along in an hour."

"I know it, and if you get these men here in less than half an hour I'll make it another sovereign."

"I'll do it; but shipmate, don't tempt me to run for I has heart disease," and Tap-room Tom started off at a more rapid pace than he had indulged in for years, while Darke Darrell sought the shadow of some freight piled up to await the coming of the packet, and then awaited his return.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TREBLE ENTRAPMENT.

In a very short time Tap-room Tom came back, panting with his exertions.

"Well?"

"They are coming."

"When?"

"They have gone over for their outfits."

"Curse th' m! they need nothing; but that reminds me that I need some provisions."

"Can you buy them for me?"

"Folks would think it strange to see me buy anything but rum."

"True; I will have to send one of them after stores, if the lazy fellows ever come."

"Here they come now; my three sovereigns, please."

"Here is your money; your men move quickly and look like good fellows."

"They are first class—Mates, this is the cap'n," and Tap-room Tom made the introduction in a grandiloquent way, as the two men advanced.

"Ho, lads, I need your services," said Darke Darrell in the off-hand manner of a skipper addressing his men.

"And I need you! you are my prisoner," and a pistol in the hand of Cass Kenedy pressed against the heart of Darke Darrell.

"In the devil's name what does this mean?" and the man started back, utterly taken off his guard; but the companion of Cass Kenedy was at his side, and he saw that resistance was useless.

"It means, Mr. Darrell, that some little acts of yours years ago, have not been forgotten, and that your coming back just at this time has a suspicious look."

"I shall give you quarters in the inn to-night, and to-morrow if there is any one willing to appear against you for past offenses, you will be the sufferer, while also I wish one, Silly Sam, and Miss Madge Vernon to have a look at you, and see if they do not recognize you as having met them on the highway some nights since."

"You will rue this, officer, for I am an honorable man, returned home to visit my aged mother, and the sins of my boyhood cannot be brought up against me at this late date."

"For your old mother's sake I do not take you to jail to-night, so that you can go free if you are not held to-morrow."

"Come with me."

"I can do nothing else, so submit."

"You are wise."

"But you I'll not forget," and Darke Darrell turned his burning eyes upon Tap-room Tom.

"T's sweet to be remembered," hummed the drunkard as he strolled away on his own hook.

By a side entrance Cass Kenedy took his prisoner to a room in the hotel, the one that had been occupied by Noel Brandon, and which opened upon the garden porch.

"Now, sir, I shall leave you free in here; but a guard is at the window without, and if you attempt to escape he has orders to shoot you down, while I shall lock this door and take the key with me."

"You will rue this night's work, constable, in arresting me," hissed Darrell.

"That remains to be seen, for I believe you intended some game to-night, or else why were you engaging seamen?"

Darrell made no reply, and Cass Kenedy walked out of the room, locking it behind him and taking the key.

"Ho, Tom, do you wish a job, for I feel you deserve it?" he said as Tap-room Tom stood in his path.

"I'm always ready to earn an honest shilling, Cass."

"Then go round to the window; here take one of my pistols, and watch that man all night."

"I'll do it, but I should have a flask to keep my eyes open."

"Go and get you one, but mind you, keep awake."

"Did you ever know me to sleep, Cass?"

"I confess I never did, as long as the bar kept open," and with a laugh he gave Tom some money, and soon after the drunkard took up his stand upon the porch, and through the window saw Darke Darrell pacing to and fro like a caged tiger.

For an hour did Tom keep his post, every few minutes taking a sip from the flask.

"It's empty; I guess it wasn't full; but I don't dare go fill it up."

"I guess I'll see if I can't make some more money."

"Let me see, I'm gettin' rich, for in the first place Cass gave me two dollars last night to treat that yonder fellow, and I didn't treat."

"No, it's against my principles to buy any liquor for a man."

"So I've got the two dollars yet; then I got two sovereigns, then three sovereigns, and then a few shillings just now, for I didn't pay for the rum I got, as I told the barmaid it was for Cass Kenedy and to charge it."

"Yes, I'm rich; but I don't see why I should not make as much more as I have, and I guess I will, after which I can go to sleep, for I'll slip down to Tinker's Tavern and fill up on rum."

Stepping up to the window Tom tapped lightly upon it.

Darrell started and then came toward the window.

"Hist," said Tom, and he motioned the prisoner to be cautious.

Slowly and noiselessly the man obeyed.

"It is you, is it?"

"It's me."

"You are an accursed traitor."

"I had to mind what my cap'n told me, so I got you bagged; but there's no reason now why I shouldn't let you out."

"Do you mean it?"

"How much is it worth?"

"A couple of sovereigns."

"Just shut the window, mate, and compose yourself until to-morrow."

"Call it five."

"I guess they'll hang you if Madcap Madge recognizes you, and and she's got sharp eyes."

Darrell grew uneasy, and said:

"I'll give you ten sovereigns."

"That will keep me in rum for six months, at the moderate way I guzzles; but call it enough for a year, and I guess that will end me up, and I doesn't care to leave any fortin to buy me a fine monument on which to record my virtues."

"You aid me to escape and I'll give you twenty sovereigns, ten now, and ten when we reach my skiff."

"Must I go with you, then?"

"Yes, because you betrayed me once and I'll be sure this time."

"Here are ten sovereigns, and the balance I have here for you when I reach my boat."

Twenty sovereigns, a hundred dollars, was a fortune for the poor devil, with what he already had, and his head was turned.

A poor school-teacher once, whose yearly pay was sixty dollars and board, to now possess in money over double that sum made him almost childish, rum-steeped as he was, and he giggled like an idiot.

"Come, start, or stay! which is it?" sternly, said Darrell.

"Start it is," and Tom led the way as the prisoner leaped lightly to the ground.

Down to the shore they went, into one of Captain Buntline's boats, and thence down to the pier.

The packet had come and gone, being now half a league away; but the skiff of Darrell was where he left it.

"Now, my man, get into the skiff and bale it out for me, and I'll give you your money."

Tom obeyed, but found no water in the boat.

As he looked up to tell Darrell so, the latter sprung upon the bows of the skiff, giving it a

shove at the same time, and it went off into the stream.

Then Tom saw two hands held out toward him.

One held the ten sovereigns, the other held a pistol, and Darrell said:

"My man, here is the balance of your money; but I need a little aid to-night, and, as you failed to get me the men I wanted, you will have to help me."

"What I promised them I'll give to you; refuse and I'll kill you as I would a dog."

Tom's teeth were chattering, for he was terribly frightened; but he said:

"Put up that weapon, and I'll go with you."

"Done!"

"You said you would give each man fifty dollars for the cruise?"

"Yes."

"And you'll give it to me?"

"Yes."

"I'll go, for I'll be rich, won't I?"

"You will, if you serve me well; now take those oars and let me see if you can row."

Sam obeyed and pulled a good stroke, though the exertion soon tired him out.

"I'll pull now," and taking the oars, Darrell sent the boat flying along on its course.

In an hour's time he reached the cliff, and finding the entrance after a short search, sent the boat into the Mystic Cove.

With staring eyes Tom looked, but kept silent, and the boat soon reached the rock.

"Mind you, Tom, don't you have anything to say, no matter what you see or hear."

"Do you understand?"

"I guess I do, but I'm kinder feeling queer."

"Stay here in this boat until my return; but I go but a few steps away, and if you touch those oars I'll drop you with a shot from my pistol."

"I'm not going to move," whispered the poor wretch.

Going into the entrance to the cavern, Darke Darrell saw the glimmer of a lantern.

Then his eyes fell upon a ship's lantern upon a basket, and reading by its light was Noel Brandon, lying upon his blanket bed.

"Mr. Brandon!"

The young sailor started, and raising himself upon his elbow, grasped a pistol that was near at hand.

"I am a friend, Mr. Brandon, sent after you by Madcap Madge."

"Come here."

Darrell walked forward into the cave, and Noel asked:

"Who are you?"

"One of Skipper Vernon's men Miss Madge sent after you, sir, for your hiding-place is known, and I have to take you on board the sloop and run you to some safe port."

"It is fearful to be thus hunted down; but I can do only as I am bid, I suppose, do I care to escape."

"I am ready, my good fellow, but you will have to help me, for I am almost helpless."

"I will, sir, and I have a poor wretch with me in the boat, whom I brought along fearing he would betray me if I left him ashore; but he'll not be in our way."

"All right, kindly collect my traps, and we'll start."

Noel Brandon raised himself upon one leg, took his crutches, and holding the lantern to give Darrell light in gathering the things together, then moved away for the boat.

The skiff was reached, Tap-room Tom lending a hand in getting the sailor and his traps into it, and dousing the lantern, Darrel seized the oars.

"Have we not met before, my man?" asked Noel.

"Yes, sir, some years ago."

"Your face and voice seem strangely familiar."

Darrell made no reply.

He had shaved off the beard he wore when he came on the packet with Noel Brandon, and the years that had passed since he had last been seen by the young aristocrat, had changed him so, that a recognition in the darkness, or by the faint light of the lantern,

as to be known only as Tap-room Tom—felt the tears come into his eyes, and he murmured:

"I am beyond redemption, so let the grave close over me when it will."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A CLEVER RUSE.

WHEN he had gotten away from the cliff some distance, Darke Darrell raised sail upon the skiff, the wind being favorable, and went merrily along at a seven-knot pace.

He seemed disinclined to talk, and several times when Noel Brandon addressed Tom, he replied to him in a way that the drunkard meant for him to keep silent.

It was some time after midnight when the Vernon Haven was reached, and then Darrell lowered sail and said:

"There are those on the large sloop that must not know of our running out, so I do not wish to be seen and hence lower sail."

"Once I get out of the harbor on the sloop, Tom, I wish you to return in the skiff to the village."

Tom nodded, and Darrell pulled into the harbor.

The Blue Bell lay where he had seen her on his former visit, and the small sloop also lay at her anchorage.

A light burned upon the Blue Bell, but the little sloop was in utter darkness.

Far up on the hills the walls of the skipper's cottage gleamed out in their whiteness, but all was as still as the grave on the water and ashore.

Gliding quietly alongside of the sloop, Darrell got on board, and to his joy, found the cabin door unlocked.

"Will you enter the cabin please, sir?" he said politely, and Noel was aided into the dark place.

"Now, Tom, let the skiff tow astern, and aid me to get sail on the sloop."

Almost noiselessly the two worked, and the jib was hoisted just enough to get steerage-way upon the craft, so that she could glide out of the harbor, for to raise the mainsail the creaking of the blocks would doubtless arouse those on the Blue Bell, or reach the ears of Skipper Vernon.

Tom then drew up the anchor, while Darrell took the helm, and the sloop glided slowly away from her anchorage, directly before the wind.

"I meant to attach an anchor to the big sloop, to keep her from sailing fast, but I am doing well enough without taking that risk."

"As it is, I have risk enough and my hands full, for I am not sure that there is a pound of provisions on board, and that Tom may give me trouble,"

"The lieutenant I can lock in the cabin, and thus he'll be safe; but it's a hard task I have cut out for myself, yet, with gold at the finish I'll not know fail!"

Without the slightest sound the sloop stretched out of the harbor, and when a long way offshore Darrell said:

"Now, Tom, help me to get up the mainsail!"

"And then I'm to take the boat back."

"Then we are to have a little talk, just as to what you are to do."

"Hain't there no spirits aboard?"

"Your skin is full of rum now."

"No it hain't, for I'm dry as a wolf."

"Don't you ever get hungry?"

"For rum, yes."

"Well, I brought a cask of rum on board—"

"Hallylujah, amen!"

"You are the rum-cask though, and you'll have to tap yourself if you want anything to drink, for unless the lieutenant has something to drink, there is not a drop on board."

"Oh, Lord! I'll have the terrors before I can get back to the village, for I never go an hour without a tipple o' some kind."

"Well, up with the mainsail."

Up went the mainsail into the air, and feeling its influence, the sloop went bowling along making fine headway under a six-knot breeze.

"Now, Tom, take the helm while I go below and light the lanterns, and see just what there is aboard ship."

Tom took the tiller with a deep sigh, and Darrell went below.

He found Noel Brandon reclining upon a cushioned seat upon the starboard side, which served also the purpose of a bed, and beneath a locker.

He knew the craft well, and a short search with his lantern revealed the fact that the provisions that had been on board of her when captured by Madcap Madge had all been taken off.

"I fear our stores were not put on board, sir, and Miss Madge must have been prevented from getting them from us, from some reason."

"All right, I can stand it, my man, if you can; besides I have something to eat in my hamper there, which will last us into Portland."

"I'll arrange you comfortably, sir, for we are started on our voyage."

"I thank you," and having been made comfortable the wounded man said he could sleep.

"It will be dawn in half an hour, sir, and I wish to drop the land as far as I can by sun-up."

"If you need me call me" and Darrell, having assumed a kindness he did not feel went on deck.

Tap-room Tom was dolefully holding the tiller and groaning.

"Bah, man, don't be a baby," sternly said Darrell.

"I want to go back, mate, and I'll start now, for I have that gnawing of my vitals for something to drink, I'll die if I don't get it."

"Maybe, or more likely you'll get the terrors."

"I've almost got 'em now, mate, for I feel like breaking things."

Darrell saw with some alarm that the wretch was really suffering.

He had been for years such a complete sot, drinking at all times, that now, deprived of it for several hours, he began to feel a craving that was irresistible.

But he said sternly:

"Well, if there's anything broken on this craft, it will be your head, so be quiet."

Tom was momentarily cowed, but then he broke out with:

"Luff up, mate, and let me go back in the skiff or I'll die."

"You go on this cruise with me, Tom, so content yourself as best you can."

"I go with you?"

"Yes, so go forward and take a nap."

"Great God! do you think sleep will come to me, man, unless my brain, my senses are steeped in rum?"

"You are a fool, for I cannot sleep unless I am drunk."

"I have a conscience and it will not be stilled, for I would have been far different a man had I not yielded to my thirst for rum."

"Oh, what a curse it has been to me, and now that I cannot get it I shall go mad—mad! did you hear?"

"You'll go overboard if you cut up any of your pranks here, Tommie my boy," was the heartless response.

"Man, do you dare me?" shouted Tom, becoming more and more wild.

"Keep still, you drunken brute, or I will silence you."

"Hal! you think me a poor harmless sot, do you?"

"But you lie! for see I am armed, and I will have your life, then run the sloop back and oh! how I'll drink, and drink, and drink the delicious rum."

"See, it is you that will die, not I!" and with a frenzied shriek the now drink-crazed man sprung toward Darrell, a pistol-flash illuminated the sloop's deck, and with a bound into the air the poor wretch went overboard into the sea.

"Ho, on deck! what was that shot?" cried Noel Brandon, whom it had awakened from a deep sleep, which the movement of the vessel had at once lulled him into.

"That drunken fool went mad for liquor, and attacked me, sir, so I was forced to shoot him," coolly said Darrell.

"And kill him?"

"He went overboard, sir."

"You surely will lay to and discover if he is wounded or not."

"He did not rise, sir, and the sloop is going a slapping place; besides I could not manage him, and it is better so as it is, for he would have betrayed you, I am confident."

"It is a sad end for the poor fellow; but is it not growing lighter?"

"Yes, sir, and we are not as far out as I could have wished, for we have just rounded Seguin Island—"

"Seguin Island? Which way do you head, my man?"

"I headed out, sir, to leave Seguin Island on my starboard, and then take a course southwest by west, so as to make Portsmouth, as it would be a better port for you to make than Portland, which is too near."

"I prefer Boston, for it is a larger town, and I can the better remain in hiding, while a vessel going into that harbor would not attract the attention it would in Portland or Portsmouth."

"I guess you are right, sir, so Boston let it be, if we can get there without starving, and you are willing, sir, to take a trick at the wheel, if I am forced to rest."

"Willingly, for I can steer all right if I am wounded, and I guess our provisions will hold out a couple of days, and we ought to reach there in that time if we have any kind of weather."

"Yes, I see that dawn is breaking fast, and I'll relieve you now at the helm."

"No, no, sir, it is not necessary now, so get what sleep you can, and when you wake up we will have something to eat, and then I'll take a nap," and little did Noel Brandon suspect that the man who seemed his friend was his bitter foe, and from whose lips had come the muttered words, after shooting poor Tom:

"Curse him! he must needs go overboard, because he had my sovereigns in his pocket."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

THE night of the flight of the prize sloop, Captain Vernon was not at home.

He had received a letter, brought by a man on horseback, early in the afternoon, and had gone overland on an expedition, which he had told Madge might detain him for several days.

Several times a year the skipper was wont to

make these inland trips, so Madge thought nothing of his going, and contented herself, as it was often her fate to do, alone, except for the companionship of the two old negroes, Philip and Phillis.

It was when left to herself that Madge had won her reputation for reckless daring, and the sobriquet of Madcap Madge, for often had she gone out to serve as pilot to some vessel in distress, and seemed to revel in the danger she faced.

Soon her name became known along the coast, and passengers on the packet ships running in and out of the Kennebec, had the name of Madcap Madge, the Maid of the Kennebec pointed out to them, and gazed upon with deep interest.

Rising early, as was her wont, Madge started out to her favorite seat, glass in hand, to have a look over the sea until Phillis called her to breakfast.

Her first glance was down in the harbor.

Something struck her that the scene was not the same that she had gazed upon at sunset the evening before.

"Something is missing—ha! it is my prize sloop!" she cried, and instantly her call brought Philip to her side.

"Where is the sloop?"

"Dunno, missy."

"My father went on horseback, did he not?"

"Yes, missy."

"But the sloop is gone."

"I don't see it, missy."

With an impatient exclamation Madge hastened down toward the Leach, and springing into her skiff sent it flying out toward the Blue Bell, which lay quietly at anchor cut in the harbor, the light at her mast-head still burning.

"These men gamble all night, and sleep late; but I will rouse them," she said, referring to the two men who comprised the crew of the Blue Bell.

"Ho, here, men! what does it mean that the prize sloop is not at her anchorage?" and Madge darted into the cabin of the Blue Bell.

The scene she came upon surprised her, and her coming was a surprise to those she found there.

Fully a dozen men were in the cabin, most of them asleep upon the floor, one seated at the table, his head upon his arms, and others snoring as they sat or reclined in chairs.

Upon the table were bottles of wine and liquors, pipes, cigars, and glasses, and a pack of cards.

It was evident that she had surprised the revellers after their orgie.

At her words they awoke, looked about them stupidly, some arose, some did not, a few tried to be gallant, and the whole effect was ludicrous in the extreme.

As for Madge, she was completely taken aback.

What did it mean, to find these men in the cabin of the Blue Bell?

Her father was away, yet he had said nothing of leaving a large crew on the vessel.

They were a wild-looking set, too, and all of them were armed to the teeth.

Turning to the one whom she knew, and who served as mate, she said, sternly:

"What does this mean, Gaspard?"

"It means, miss—it means—" and Gaspard came to a sudden halt.

"What does it mean, I ask you, that I find the cabin of the Blue Bell full of drunken sailors, and my father away?"

"It's the new crew your father has shipped, miss."

"What new crew?"

"The new crew, miss," and Gaspard's head was by no means clear.

"I knew not that he had either shipped or needed a new crew."

"Yes, miss, he does."

"What for?"

"To sail the Blue Bell, miss, for times is getting dangerous, and he wants to be able to protect his vessel."

"Gaspard, there is some mystery in this that you are keeping back; but upon my father's return I will know all from him."

"Yes, miss."

"But I shall advise him to get a crew of sober men, and not carousers, and who allow a vessel to be cut out under their very noses."

"The prize sloop Madcap gone!" cried Gaspard in amazement, making a rush for the deck.

"Hold! answer me! did you not know she was gone?" and Madge stepped directly before him, stopping him as he was about to bolt out of the cabin, and his example the others were anxious to follow to escape those expressive eyes turned upon them.

"No, Miss Madge—upon my honor I did not know it."

"She must have got free from her anchor and drifted out to sea with the tide."

"Nonsense! her anchor was all right, and so was her cable, for I left her shipshape."

"She has gone to sea with some one at her helm, and doubtless the one who brought her here."

"But we would have seen or heard something, and—"

"You were half-drunk, and absorbed in your game, would hear nothing; but come on deck and see what is to be done."

"These men must not show themselves, miss."

"Why not?"

"It might excite suspicion to have so many men seen on the Blue Bell."

"It excites my suspicion to find them hiding in her cabin; but you three and Melmer come on deck, and we will try and solve this mystery, while you, men, see to it that there is no more such carrying on in this sloop," and Madge turned and left the cabin, to the great relief of the dazed crew.

Gaspard and Melmer, the two men belonging to the Blue Bell, and whom Madge had supposed were all there, were on board, followed her on deck, and springing into her skiff, they rowed to where the sloop had ridden at anchor.

"She did not slip her cable, but got up anchor, set sail, and boldly put to sea; you were indeed dead drunk."

"But let us see if we can discover her," and Madge hastily rowed ashore and ascended to the lookout on the cliff.

Far away, with her glass, she saw a sail.

"It is a sloop, but too far off for me to see if it is the Madcap," she said.

"Guess it must be the sloop, miss," said Melmer.

"I shall give chase, so get the Blue Bell in trim, while I go to the cottage for breakfast."

"And mind you, I will not be on board for some little time, as I have to make a visit before I start."

"Had we not better take the Blue Bell and go in chase, miss?" asked Gaspard.

"No, for you are all half-drunk now, and would not know what you were after."

"I will go myself, and when I come on board I expect to see the Blue Bell in the best condition, for she looked like a taproom just now," and Madge hastened toward the house.

She hastily ate her breakfast, and then sent Philip with a note to Joyce Brandon, bidding him deliver it to the maiden only, and to go in haste.

Going down to the cove, she then sprung into her skiff, set sail, and stood rapidly up the river.

She held on, keeping close in-shore, until she came to the cliffs, and then she took in her canvas, and seizing her oars, sent the light craft into the pass through the rocks.

She soon found herself in the Mystic Cove, and reaching the other side of the basin, sprung ashore and darted into the cave.

It was vacant.

"My God! he has gone, and I'll wager high that he is on the sloop."

"But who has taken him from here, for we could not go alone?"

For a moment she stood in deep and painful thought, and then she said:

"Before I act I must see Silly Sam, for he may have found out that he would be discovered here, and so aided him to escape."

"Yes, I guess Sam did it, and is now away in the sloop."

"I will go to the village and see if Sam is there, and that will show whether I am right or not."

She hastily glanced about her, hoping to find a note, but nothing met her eye, no explanation was left of the mysterious disappearance of Noel Brandon from the cave on the Mystic Cove, and springing into her skiff once more, Madcap Madge regained the river and headed for the little town.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CAPTAIN KYD OFFERS AN EXPLANATION.

UPON arriving at the village Madge discovered that there was some cause for excitement, and beheld men standing about in groups earnestly talking together.

"Good-morning, Miss Madge, what brings you to the village so early?" cried a cheery voice, as she was passing the Flag Ship on her way to Saunders's cottage, where Silly Sam dwelt.

It was Cass Kenedy, the constable, who spoke, and she stopped as he advanced toward her.

"I often run up to town for stores, Mr. Kenedy," she answered.

"Seen anything suspicious on the river this morning, Miss Madge?" asked the young constable in a low tone.

"What do you call suspicious?"

"Any strange vessels?"

"No, I've seen no strange vessel on the river; but have they captured Mr. Brandon, for I see there is some excitement this morning?"

"No."

"What is it all about?"

"It is my opinion, Miss Madge, that we won't capture Master Noel Brandon, for his sake I hope not, for I always liked him, and cannot believe him guilty, wild though he was."

"You see, I think he was aided to escape by those who knew just what they were about, and they do not intend he shall be captured, do they?" and Cass Kenedy looked squarely into the maiden's face.

But not a flush crossed it, nor did a muscle change, as she replied:

"You seem to imply that I know something of Mr. Brandon's whereabouts, but I pledge you I do not know where he is; but something has happened in the village, as I can see, and, as you do not seem inclined to tell me, I will look up Silly Sam and find out."

"I will tell you with pleasure, for it is no secret. The fact is, Miss Madge, there was a suspicious character here, and I suspected him; so putting a spy on his track, I found that he wished to ship two seamen for a service that would be perilous."

"I shipped as one of those men, my deputy being the other, and we arrested the man and I locked him up in the Flag Ship, in the same room that the lieutenant had escaped from."

"I had nothing really against the man, but intended investigating him thoroughly this morning, and left Tap-room Tom to guard him."

"Now this man was one who had been years away from home, and was known as Darke Darrell, the son of a poor widow living on the other shore."

"I have heard of him, and gossip says he has been seen on the deck of a pirate."

"Yes, Miss Madge, and knowing this, is why I had him dogged, and finding he wished to ship two men for some work, I nabbed him, and, as I said, left Tom to guard him."

"But this morning he is gone, and along with him Tap-room Tom, who, though a wretched sot, I felt I could trust."

"This is strange."

"Yes, and this escape is the cause of the excitement you see."

"I went over to the widow Darrell's, and she told me that her son had gone to Boston for a short time, so I felt assured he was not in hiding at home, and that his mother knew nothing of his whereabouts."

"I thank you, Mr. Kenedy; but what kind of a looking man is this Darrell?"

"A man with a clean-shaven face, the beard having evidently been cut off, for the skin is white, and not sunburnt, as is the rest of his face."

"About what height, and how dressed?"

"About my height, and dressed as a sailor."

"Ah!" said Madge.

"Have you seen such a man, Miss Madge?"

"When I was acting as pilot on the United States cutter Scorpion, such a man came on board and offered to find Lieutenant Brandon for a given sum; but he did not find him, and left the vessel."

"And you do not know where he went?"

"No, sir."

"You are sure it was this man Darrell?"

"The description answers perfectly, especially the newly-shaven beard, leaving the face white; but I must go," and, with a sweet smile, Madge hastened on to the gambler's cottage.

Silly Sam was seated upon the front doorstep, playing with some of the cartman's children, but rose with a glad smile, and came toward Madge.

"Sam, have you been to the Mystic Cove since you took Master Noel there?" she asked, hastily.

"No, Miss Madge."

"He is not there."

"Gone!" and Madge saw that Sam was really surprised.

"Yes, he has gone, and so has my prize sloop."

"No!"

"Yes, she was cut out of the harbor last night, and run off to sea, while no one in the Blue Bell saw it."

"Why, Miss Madge!"

"Now, Sam, will you go with me to find Master Noel?"

"Certainly, Madge."

"And to recapture my sloop?"

"Oh, yes, I'll go."

"Then get ready, and go down to my house and I will join you there; but you had better walk, for to see you go away in your boat might excite suspicion, and I do not wish Cass Kenedy to know what I am about, for though he is friendly, he yet keeps his eyes open, and just now he is watching everything and everybody," and Madge told Sam of the capture and escape of Darke Darrell and the disappearance of Tap-room Tom.

"I'll walk there, Madge, and start now," and while Silly Sam returned to the cottage to prepare for his trip, Madge ventured on to the cabin of old Captain Kyd, the Hermit Sailor.

Captain Kyd sat before his door, enjoying the evening breeze, but rose with a smile as he saw his fair visitor walking rapidly toward him.

"Good-morning, sweet lady, and I need not ask you if you are well, for your cheeks are rosy and your eyes are sparkling."

"I am well, Captain Kyd, but worried, and I have come to tell you why," and Madge told of her father's departure, the disappearance of the sloop, the mysterious leaving the cave of Noel Brandon and the escape of Darke Darrell.

"This is all very strange, Miss Madge, especially the disappearance of Lieutenant Noel; but putting the different threads together, I believe that Darke Darrell is at the bottom of it all."

"You do so believe?"

"Yes, and for the reason that he seemed so

anxious to capture the lieutenant, and said he would yet do so."

"He has gone, the lieutenant is gone, and your sloop has been kidnapped."

"Now, neither you or Silly Sam know aught of the lieutenant's going, and I think Darrell is the man to find."

"And you think he will be on the runaway sloop, and with him the lieutenant?"

"That is my idea now, sis, through your reasoning, so I must find the sloop."

"By all means, and the sooner the better."

"I will go at once, and upon my return will see you," and hastily bidding the old Hermit Sailor good-bye, Madge returned to the village, made a few purchases, and then rapidly walked down to her skiff.

The sail was quickly raised by Cass Kenedy, who saw her coming, and taking her seat at the tiller, she was about to cast off, when the young constable said:

"If you see anything of a suspicious nature, Miss Madge, you will inform me?"

"Certainly, Mr. Kenedy."

"It may be that I shall have to run down to Portland and Boston, Miss Madge, and if so, I would like to get the little prize sloop, the Madcap, I believe you call her, for the voyage."

"If she is in port, Mr. Kenedy, she will be at your service."

"Do you anticipate using her?"

"She is away just now, as is also my father."

"Ah! your father has taken a little run in her—I guess to try her," said Cass Kenedy, misunderstanding the remark of Madge, as she had wished him to do.

"Good-bye, Mr. Kenedy," said Madge, and she motioned to him to cast off, which he did, and her skiff bounded swiftly away before a brisk breeze, and was headed homeward, Madge more and more convinced that the flight of the sloop, Madcap, had something to do with the remarkable disappearance of Noel Brandon from the cavern.

CHAPTER XXVII.

OUT OF THE SEA.

IT was afternoon before Madcap Madge returned to the cottage.

She saw the Blue Bell lying at anchor, her sails loose and ready to set at a moment's notice, and upon her deck were Gaspard and Melmer, no one else being visible.

"Get the Bell under way, and I will come off as soon as I can," she called out to Gaspard as she sped shoreward.

Arriving at the cottage she found that Phillis had a good dinner preparing for her.

"Take a horse and go up the village highway, Philip, until you meet Silly Sam and bring him here as quickly as you can," she said to Philip, and as the old negro started in the cart to obey her order, she prepared herself for her voyage.

"No sails in sight, Phillis?" she asked.

"No, missy, hain't seen arry sail to-day."

"I'll be away perhaps for some days, so tell my father upon his return that the Madcap was cut out and I went in search of her in the Blue Bell."

"Yas, missy."

Going into her room Madge selected a pair of pistols and some ammunition, and got together a little roll of baggage she wished to take with her.

Then she went to a corner of the room, raised the carpet and a wooden floor was revealed.

Standing on the boards the other end tipped up displaying a trap, and beneath was an iron box.

This she opened with a key and took out a bag of gold, replacing things as they had been before.

Just then Philip returned and with him was Silly Sam.

"What, so soon?" cried Madge.

"I didn't lose any time, Miss Madge," answered Sam.

"Well, get the dust off of you and we will have some dinner and then be off."

"Any news, Miss Madge?"

"No, and yet I have a clew to who has taken the sloop; but I will tell you all I know when we are on the Blue Bell," and the two soon after sat down to a dinner that would tempt one who really had no appetite.

Having finished the meal they started for the shore and soon after ran alongside of the Blue Bell, for Gaspard stood in to meet the skiff.

"Now Gaspard, put the sloop under full sail and head for Portland, and get the rest of the crew to aid you, if they are sober," said Madge, as she stepped on deck.

"They are sober enough, Miss Madge, but there are curious eyes along this coast, and the men better remain below decks until we get well away from the Kennebec."

"All right, Gaspard, but if my father wishes a good crew for the Blue Bell, I do not see why he should keep them in hiding," and Madge broke the seal of a letter which Philip had brought her from Brandon Hall, in answer to the one she had written, telling Joyce of the kidnapping of the Madcap, and that she would leave at once to see if Noel Brandon was safe and let her know.

Though not having time to read her letter at the cottage, Madge had told Phillis to tell Miss Brandon that she had gone in the Blue Bell in chase of the sloop, and would see her immediately upon her return, but to feel no uneasiness.

She knew that Joyce would understand this.

The letter from the beautiful girl was of a most friendly nature, and she told Madge that she would ride over to the cottage the next day to learn any tidings that she might have for her.

Having destroyed the letter, Madge turned to the sailing of the Blue Bell, taking the tiller herself.

"Is not that some one in the sea?—look, as it rises on a wave!" she suddenly cried, as she beheld a dark object upon the waters.

All eyes were turned in the direction indicated, but, before they discovered what Madge saw, she continued excitedly:

"It is a man, and he is clinging to a plank—quick! get the skiff ready, and I will run near and lay to—see, he is waving to us."

A man's arm was now seen to wave above the waters, and soon after the Madcap ran down near and luffed up.

Silly Sam and Gaspard sprung into the skiff, and in ten minutes they were back again, bearing in their arms a limp and unconscious form.

"It's Tap-room Tom, Miss Madge," cried Sam.

Madge gave a slight start in spite of her self-control.

Tap-room Tom she remembered had been the man who stood guard over Darke Darrell, and it seemed that now she was to know all, and by a strange circumstance of taking a half-drowned man from the water.

Had she not caught sight of his form, as it arose upon the waves, the sloop would have passed him by, and his death would follow, for he was then unconscious.

The bloated face of the drunkard looked ghastly as the men lifted him upon the deck, and Madge saw that he breathed heavily.

Quickly she descended into the cabin and brought up with her a bottle of brandy.

"Force this between his lips, and rub him well, for he is half dead," she said.

It was a long time before Tom showed signs of returning animation.

The sloop was held on her course, and to the evident deep surprise of Silly Sam, the half-score of men in the forward hold came on deck, by the command of Madge, who now felt that they could not be seen from the coast which was leagues away.

"Will he never be able to speak?" cried Madge, as she gazed into the face of the unconscious man.

"He's getting better, Miss Madge, but slowly."

"He'll come round all right," volunteered Sam, and then turning his gaze upon the men who were grouped together forward, he continued in a whisper:

"Who are they?"
"Some of my father's crew."

"I never seen 'em afore!"
"Nor I Sam."

"They look like pirates."
"They may be for all I know, but if he trusts them, I can, I guess."

Silly Sam shook his head, and then asked:
"Where did you get them?"

"They were on the sloop."
"Hope they are all right, Miss Madge."

"I hope so too, Sam."
"You has got weapons on board?"

"Yes, I am armed."
"Any for me?"

"Yes, there are some in the cabin."
"I'll go down pretty soon and look 'em up; but I guesses that Gaspard and Melmer is all right."

"Oh yes, we can trust them, and if those

fellow mean mischief we will be four against ten, Sam."

"Big odds; but I've seen big odds come out small in my time; but Tom is getting better, see!"

The eyes of the drunkard now opened, and his lips parted.

"He says something, Sam; see if you can understand him."

"I don't hear him, but I guess I know what he wants."

"Well?"

"Rum."

"Give him some of the brandy."

The way in which Tap-room Tom swallowed the brandy showed that Sam had not been far wrong.

"You see, Miss Madge, he never touches water, and he has been pretty well soaked, so he's got to counteract the effects of the sea with the rum, or he'll die."

"Then give him more," said Madge, not knowing how much a man needed to counteract the effects of a long stay in salt water.

Tap-room Tom gave a satisfied grunt, as he took more brandy, and the prescription seemed to be of immense benefit, for he opened his eyes wide, glanced out upon the sea, and then at Madge, while he asked:

"Am I dead?"

"Not by any means, Tom; but you were nearly dead when we took you out of the sea," said Madge, kindly.

"I got wet," Tom remarked, with a shudder, at the thought of coming in contact with water.

"You did indeed."

"I'm dry now."

"No, but we'll find you something dry to put on."

"No, it hain't the clothes, miss, but I'm dry inside."

"Will you have some water?"

"I think I have had just a trifle too much, so if you have a leetle drop of rum on board, I'll be obliged for a spoonful."

"I have no rum, but we have brandy, such as you have had."

"Have I had any?"

"Yes, several times."

"And I didn't know it? What a pity; but I'd like a thimbleful more, miss."

"You shall have all you want, my man."

"All I want! then I'm in great luck," and Tom seized the bottle and took a long pull at it.

"You'll get drunk, Tom," said Silly Sam.

"Sam, is that you?" and he eyed the youth.

"Yes, I'm here."

"And you say I'll get drunk on a little brandy."

"Oh, no, it will take weeks o' drinking to get me back to my former happy state, for the long struggle in the sea has made me sober."

"You better stay so," said Madge.

"Oh, no, lady, for if I were to get wholly sober, my sins would rise before me in such a fearful way that I'd commit suicide," and the man seemed in desperate earnest.

"Now tell me how you came to be in the water."

"You are Madcap Madge, arn't you, for my eyes are a leetle watery yet."

"Yes, I am Madge Vernon."

"Silly Sam, on board the Blue Bell, skipper Vernon's sloop, and yonder men I don't know," and Tom gazed at the strange crew forward.

"They are men that have come with me on this cruise, and I again ask you how it was we came to find you in the water, for upon your story much depends," and Madcap Madge spoke sternly.

Tap-room Tom started, clasped his hand upon his pocket, then thrust it inside and drew out a handful of gold.

"It is safe!" he cried eagerly.

"I believe he has lost his mind," impatiently said Madge.

"He's more likely drunk," Sam muttered.

"No, Sam, not quite drunk enough to remember correctly or to tell my story straight."

"Another pull at the bottle, miss, and I'll tell you just what took place, though it does not reflect great credit upon me to do so."

Madge saw that the man seemed rather to improve under the influence of the brandy, and anxious to hear his story, she gave him

the bottle once more, and this time it seemed as though he'd never let go until he had drained it.

But he did so, and smacking his lips with great gusto he said:

"Now I can talk, miss, and I will."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON BOARD THE BLUE BELL.

IT was some time before Tap-room Tom composed himself to tell his story, but at last he began and, without striving to defend himself told Madge and Silly Sam how he had been tempted to release the prisoner, Darke Darrell, to get gold, and had done so.

Then he made known how cleverly he had been taken prisoner himself by his former captive, and of the run down to the Mystic Cove, and the carrying off of Noel Brandon.

"And this man Darke led him to believe that he had been sent after him?" Madge asked.

"Yes, miss."

"This accounts for the easy manner in which he got the lieutenant into his power; but pray continue, my man."

Tom then told of the clever way in which the sloop had been run off with, and then of the fearful pangs of anguish he suffered when he could get nothing to drink.

The remembrance of his sufferings were too much for him and he instantly seized the brandy bottle and took another long drink.

"I feel better now with this life-preserver in me," and he looked affectionately at the bottle.

"Go on with your story," said Madge.

"Well, Darrell wouldn't give me any rum, and he wouldn't let me take the skiff and go back, so I determined to jump overboard and die, rather than suffer as I did."

"But it seems to me my brain grew wild, and that I felt a desire to kill him, and then I heard a pistol-shot, a bullet flew by my head, and I fell overboard."

"I remember to have seen an island not far away, and the water reviving me, I determined to try and save my life."

"The sloop had gone on rapidly, and I was alone in the sea."

"But I felt better, and struck out for the island, which now seemed a long way off."

"But the tide was running out, and I felt that I must die, and I gave myself up for lost, and oh! the horror of that moment, for I saw all my misdeeds as in a glass held up before me."

"I must die drunk, miss, when I go, for I'd die a raving maniac if I was sober enough to think of the past."

"But suddenly I felt a blow in the back, and turning, beheld a large log."

"Instantly I grasped it, dragged myself upon it, and felt that I need not drown."

"Dawn came, and suffering intense agony I drifted about."

"I kept my mouth full of salt water, to allay my thirst, and yet I thought at times it was best to let go the log and die."

"But I held on, and at last sighted this sloop, and you have saved me," and Tom again seized the bottle.

"And Darrell evidently believed that he shot you?"

"Yes, miss."

"But made no effort to see if you sunk?"

"None, for I do not believe he looked back, even."

"And Mr. Brandon, where was he?"

"Lying in the cabin, and doubtless asleep."

"Did you hear Darrell say where he was going?"

"He spoke of Portland, but the lieutenant said Boston, so the sloop was headed for that port."

"But with only Darrell to do all the work, he will doubtless make Portland."

"I don't know, for he's a good one, is that man, and alone or in company, seems all the same as to nerve."

"Well, I will go first to Portland, under the belief that one man cannot manage the sloop alone for a great length of time, and will seek the nearest port."

"If he is not there we will at once go to Boston, and I believe follow him into port very close in his wake, for with the breeze we are getting, he will be unable to stand the strain under full sail and must consequently reef, while with our force we can hold on under full pressure."

The Sea Fugitive.

"Now, my man, you say that the lieutenant and Darrell seemed friendly?"

"Oh, yes, miss, perfectly so."

"That man Darrell is playing a bold and desperate game," muttered Madge, and then she added, as she turned away, and stood gazing listlessly over the waters:

"I know his intention is to give Noel Brandon up and claim a large reward for so doing, and doubtless gain his revenge too upon him, after what I have heard from Sam of the feud between the two when they were boys."

"Well, I'll not spare canvas on the Blue Bell, and she must not let the Madcap run into port too far in her lead, for once Noel Brandon is a prisoner on board a vessel of war, it is useless to attempt to save him, and his death at the yard-arm will quickly follow."

"If I believed Noel Brandon guilty, even, I would wish to save his life; but I cannot, I will not believe that he is an assassin and a robber."

"No, he cannot be that," and her voice quivered as she spoke.

And on, over the blue waters, driven by a ten-knot breeze, the Blue Bell sped.

Gaspard looked at the canvas spread, and then at her lee rail under water half the time and said:

"You are driving her hard, miss."

"She must stand it."

"She is pressed down low to leeward, miss."

"Then get ballast to windward, and all of you sit upon the windward rail," was the reply.

This order was obeyed, and the sloop kept upon a more level keel, yet still staggered under the canvas she carried.

But Madge felt that the Madcap had had a long start and was a fleet craft, and must be overhauled before reaching port if possible, so she took the chance of losing the mast to hold on.

Soon after darkness fell, the Blue Bell swept like a race-horse into Portland harbor, and bidding Gaspard and Sam take her skiff, and Melmer and two of the strange crew to go in the sloop's boat and search the lower harbor, Madge kept on in the vessel up to the end of the haven, closely examining every craft they drew near.

But the Madcap was nowhere visible, and putting back she swept on down the harbor, to pick up first the sloop's boat and then her skiff, and to hear the same report from those in them.

"I think yonder schooner-of-war is suspicious of us, miss, for I heard her officer call out to a middy going ashore in a boat to tell the captain to come right off, as the sloop was behaving in a very suspicious way."

"Well, we will have to outrun her, that is all, should she give chase."

"Here take the helm, and cut corners close to get out to sea, while I take a look at the schooner," and Madge relinquished the tiller to Gaspard, while she raised her glass and bent it upon a graceful little schooner-of-war that lay anchored in the lower part of the harbor.

As she looked there came a bright flash from the schooner's side, and a round shot came flying over the sloop.

"That is to heave-to, but I shall obey no such orders," she said calmly.

"Then the schooner will come in chase."

"Let her do so."

"She looks awful fast, miss."

"So is the Blue Bell," was the quiet response, and then she added, without the slightest show of excitement:

"There comes another shot."

The second shot flew far above the deck of the sloop and sunk some distance ahead.

"She is getting on sail, Gaspard," said Madge still watching her through her glass.

"And they intend to keep the music up, miss," Gaspard rejoined, as shot after shot now came flying after the sloop, yet doing no damage.

It could be seen that the schooner had her sails up now, and her anchor, while she forged ahead; but yet she did not start in pursuit of the sloop.

"She stands off and on, Gaspard, as though waiting for some one."

"The captain doubtless, miss, which the boat went ashore for; but the officer aboard

has the schooner all ready to come in chase, the moment her commander arrives."

"Yes, he is in earnest—ah! she sends a broadside after us," and Madge coolly watched the effect of the shots.

But the distance was now too great, and the iron messengers fell short.

"Well, we are out of range, and soon will be out of sight, so I hope the commander will not come off for some time, for in half an hour we will be so far ahead he will not know whether we have gone up or down the coast, or out to sea," and Madge devoted her attention now to getting everything out of the sloop that could be made, and the graceful craft went along as though she was fully conscious of all that was depending upon her.

After rounding Cape Elizabeth, and getting the brisk breeze fairly on her port quarter, the Blue Bell flew along like a frightened bird, while her crew looked anxiously at her vast spread of sail, expecting each moment to hear the snap of her slender mast.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MADCAP'S ARRIVAL IN PORT.

So rapid did the Blue Bell, under her tremendous spread of sail, drop the harbor of Portland astern of her, that when the schooner's commander, called from a festive scene of enjoyment on board, by the loud pealing of his guns, did reach his deck and head his pretty craft seaward, the suspicious-looking sloop had vanished.

Whether to go on out to sea, to run down or up the coast, the schooner's commander did not know, for not a vessel was near whose skipper he could question regarding the Blue Bell's course.

It would be too late to rejoin the festivities upon his return, and having given up his pleasure, and lost the suspicious sloop, he was in no enviable frame of mind, and gave orders to cruise along the coast until dawn, hoping that he might sight the little fugitive vessel.

In the meantime the Blue Bell was bowing swiftly along on her course for Boston.

I will now return to the little sloop Madcap, after her daring sailing-master had gotten rid of Tap-room Tom, as he believed, killing him with a pistol-shot.

Noel Brandon exerted himself to take the helm for awhile, and thus Darrell got some rest; but with the wind blowing fresh and the sea running high, the wounded sailor found it no easy task to steer the vessel, and he was forced time and again to call upon Darrell, for crippled as he was, he could do but little.

The provisions brought from the cavern, were all they had on board, and these soon ran short, so the voyage turned out just what Darke Darrell had feared that it would, a very hard one.

He did think of making Portsmouth, but concluded he had better stand on for Boston, for there he knew he would find the Scorpion and could deliver his victim, for such Noel Brandon really was, up to Lieutenant Maynard.

So on he held, and after a hard run, reached an anchorage in the harbor of Boston before dawn the second night after leaving the Kennebec.

Darrell knew the harbor well, and he sought an out-of-the-way place, dropped anchor, and sought the rest he so much needed.

He did not anticipate any trouble, as he knew that Noel Brandon looked upon him as befriending, not betraying him.

"In the morning, lieutenant, I will go ashore and hunt you up good quarters, and to-morrow night you can be moved into them, for it would not be safe to go by daylight," he said to Noel Brandon, as the yacht was gliding up the harbor through the darkness.

"I thank you, my man, and I will reward you well; but I am the more surprised at your kindness toward me from the fact that I at least recognize just who you are."

"Indeed! and who am I, Lieutenant Brandon?"

"You are Darke Darrell, and we were boys together."

"I need not deny it, sir, for we were."

"You were not friendly toward me then, Darrell, and you attempted my life, so I now wonder at your saving it."

"That was in the past, sir, and now I say let it rest."

"The truth was you were rich, and I poor, and I hated you for the difference it made in our lives."

"Then I was a wild, reckless fellow, and went wrong; but I have been knocked about the world of late until I have gotten some sense, and the result of it all is, that I have changed my ways."

"I love gold, and I get gold for serving you, and that is why I act as I do, perhaps, rather than from friendship."

"You are frank, at least; but who gives you gold to serve me?"

"Madcap Madge of course."

"This is strange."

"You know best her motives, sir."

"But I shall pay you, sir, instead of permitting you to receive money from her."

"What did she promise you?"

"One thousand dollars, and the sloop to sell for myself."

"Ah! I will give you the amount, and as the sloop is hers, buy it from you and pay your price, for I may need just such a craft."

"In the mean time I will engage you to take care of the craft until I am able to be about."

"Agreed, sir; and I hold the sloop at fifteen hundred."

"Here is the money," and the victim counted out, from a large roll of bank-notes, the stated sum, and handing it to Darke Darrell, said:

"Now sign me a receipt in full for your service money and the sloop's price," and taking up a quill and ink-horn that were in the vessel, he wrote what he wished Darrell to sign.

With a strange look upon his face Darke Darrell took up the pen and without glancing at the receipt signed it by the light from the cabin companionway.

Then he said:

"Here we are at the anchorage, sir, and we will soon be able to rest," and he luffed sharp, dropped anchor, lowered sail, and then turned in, as I have before stated, utterly worn out.

The sun was high in the heavens when he awoke.

Noel Brandon had been awake for some time, and was suffering with his wound; but he would not disturb his shipmate, knowing how tired he was.

"Well, Darrell, you have had a good sleep," he said.

"Yes, and I needed it: but now to go ashore and get some breakfast, for I'm hungry and I know you are."

"I am, but my wound pains me, and I'll just ask you to dress it."

A frown crossed the face of Darrell, but he did as asked and then sprung into the skiff and rowed ashore.

He was gone perhaps an hour, and then returned with a tin kettle containing a good meal, and which Noel Brandon ate with considerable relish.

It was now afternoon, and telling his victim he would look him up a good stopping-place the seaman departed once more for the shore.

His first duty was to find the Scorpion, and this he soon accomplished, her anchorage not being very far distant.

It was three o'clock when he boarded her, and he was told that Lieutenant Maynard was at dinner.

"I'll wait his pleasure," he said to the middy.

"I do not know whether he will see you, for he's not in a pleasant humor toward you, after the way you fooled him up in the Kennebec."

"He'll find that he was the one deceived, and that I knew what I was about."

"Just tell him, please, that I am on board awaiting his pleasure."

The middy obeyed, and soon returned with information that his commander would see him.

Entering the handsome cabin of the Scorpion, Darrell found Lieutenant Maynard seated at the table with Ray Raymond and Leo Lauderdale.

They had finished their dinner and were smoking and chatting pleasantly.

"Well, sir, what brings you here?" he asked sternly.

"To see you, sir, upon an important mat-

ter, and I would like that our interview be private."

"As you please; but had you delivered up to me Noel Brandon, as you said you could, you would now have been the happy possessor of ten thousand dollars, which reward has been offered for him, dead or alive."

The eyes of Darrell sparkled as he replied:

"I am here, sir, to lay claim to that reward," and he glanced at the two officers who had excused themselves and were going on deck.

"Indeed! have you knowledge of Brandon's hiding-place?" eagerly asked the officer.

"I have more, sir, for I have him a prisoner."

"No! well, you shall have the reward upon his delivery to me."

"I have investigated the charges against Brandon, since I returned, and I feel assured that he is really guilty, for every circumstance points to his having killed his captain and then robbed him, so I have no sympathy for him now."

"Where shall I deliver him to you, sir?"

"When can you do so?"

Darrell did not wish to make the time too short, so he said:

"To-night, sir, at ten o'clock."

"That will do; but where is he?"

"Safe, sir, as though he was on your vessel; but if you will have a boat's crew ready at ten, I will come on board and lead them to his hiding-place, and when he is on board your vessel I shall claim the reward."

"You shall have it, my man, and I congratulate you upon your success in capturing him, though I am sorry, for the honor of the service that he has to hang, while I deeply sympathize with his unhappy parents and sister."

"It is bad, sir, but he brought it all upon himself."

"True, and yet he is to be pitied; but come on board at ten to-night, and I'll go with you myself," and Darrell thus dismissed, took his departure from the cabin, his heart rejoicing over the rich reward he was to receive as blood-money for the capture of Noel Brandon.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE BLUE BELL'S ARRIVAL IN PORT.

It was certainly a wonder that the Blue Bell carried the spread of canvas she did without an accident, and Gaspard and Melmer shook their heads anxiously as they glanced aloft while the fleet craft bounded along through the rough waters.

But Captain Vernon had had the Blue Bell especially built, and he knew just what she could do, if put to the test, and he had told Madge over and over again of her wonderful powers of endurance under canvas.

Neither Gaspard or Melmer had seen her thoroughly tried before, so were dubious; but her girl commander watched her closely, and she saw that the brave little sloop would bear all she had put her to the test to stand.

When it became evident that she would run into Boston, if she held on, before nightfall, Madge shortened sail, for she did not care to enter the port by daylight.

So it was after night when the Blue Bell cruised into the harbor.

She passed along very slowly, every eye on the alert to find the Madcap, and a reward having been offered by Madge to the one who discovered her, all were most anxious to get it.

The harbor was well filled with vessels, and several false alarms were given; but running near the craft that had been taken for the Madcap, it was soon seen that it was not the pretty sloop.

The Scorpion was passed at her anchorage, just at eight o'clock, and Madge saw her officers walking up and down the deck, smoking and conversing.

So on the Blue Bell went in her search, and all were beginning to fear that the Madcap had not made that harbor, but had run into some other port, when Madge descried the little vessel anchored in an out-of-the-way nook.

"I'll give you your reward for grog, lads, as I have won it," she said with a laugh, as she headed the Blue Bell for the Madcap.

Under shortened sail the Blue Bell glided along, and soon drifted slowly under the stern of the Madcap.

A lamp burned in the cabin, and shone out of the companionway, but no one was visible upon the deck.

Lightly Madge sprung aboard, followed by Silly Sam, whom she had told to accompany her, and stepping down into the cabin, she was face to face with Noel Brandon.

He sat by the table writing, his wounded leg being on a chair to support it, and he was alone.

His face was pale, covered by several days' growth of beard, and he looked wan, and to be in pain.

"Madge! can I believe my eyes?" he exclaimed, stretching forth his hand eagerly, while his face beamed with pleasure.

"Mr. Brandon, I am glad to have found you, and you must go with me at once," she said.

"But Darrell, acting under your orders, Miss Madge, has gone ashore to get men to move me to comfortable quarters he has secured."

"Mr. Brandon, that man Darrell is your worst foe, and he is going to give you up to the Government, for he kidnapped you for that purpose only, and I have chased the sloop here in the Blue Bell, determined to save you."

"Great God! can this be so, Madge?"

"It is true, as you can learn, by telling me how you came to leave with him."

In a few words Noel Brandon told all, and then Madge made known the circumstances attending the discovery of his being gone, the flight of the sloop, and the chase.

"Now we have no time to lose, so I will put a crew on board the Madcap, and have you transferred to the Blue Bell, while from Tap-room Tom you can learn of the perfidy of Darrell, and I am only sorry we cannot carry him back as a prisoner, but your safety is what must be looked to now," and Madge at once gave her orders.

The two vessels were brought side by side, the wounded officer was taken on board the Blue Bell, Gaspard and four men took charge of the Madcap, some provisions were given them, and in half an hour after the finding of the fugitive sailor the two vessels glided away, and headed down the harbor.

As they got clear of the shipping anchored here and there, they increased their spread of canvas, and by midnight were flying along at a rattling speed over the blue waters of the sea, Noel Brandon once more saved from the gallows by the courage of Madcap Madge, the Maid of the Kennebec.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SURPRISE.

PUNCTUAL as clockwork, Darke Darrell went on board the Scorpion, to keep his important appointment with Lieutenant Maynard.

He had carefully prepared his victim for the trap into which he was leading him, by taking his weapons out of his reach, and then telling him he had secured pleasant quarters, and soon after ten o'clock would bring out with him several men, who could easily move him.

So of course he did not think that there would be any trouble through resistance, when Noel Brandon found he was so cleverly captured and had no weapons with which to defend himself.

Congratulating himself upon his scheme, he went on board the Scorpion in high glee.

He would get ten thousand dollars in blood money, and he had received twenty-five hundred already from his victim, while he meant to rob him, if possible, at the moment of his capture, of the bank-notes he had seen him have.

So all seemed to work well for the treacherous Darke Darrell, and he entered the Scorpion's cabin with a smile.

"All ready, sir," he said, gleefully.

Mayo Maynard was disgusted with the fellow's joy over the suffering he must bring upon another, and said, coldly:

"Your anticipation of a large sum in blood-money makes you most joyous, my man."

"I have hope of the reward, sir, and I am poor, while I also shall gain a little revenge."

"Ah, that then is also your incentive; but I will be ready immediately."

In five minutes after the skiff, containing Darke Darrell, and the cutter's boat, with Lieutenant Maynard, Leo Lauderdale and

half a dozen seamen, left the side of the vessel and pulled quietly away in the darkness.

Darke Darrell led in the skiff, and headed directly for the anchorage of the sloop, the boat following in his wake.

At length he turned and looked ahead of him, as he rested upon his oars.

"I don't see her," he muttered, and again he pushed on, to soon after stop once more.

"Great God! where is the sloop?" he cried aloud.

"That is just what you were to show us," responded Mayo Maynard from the boat, and who had heard his exclamation.

"I left her yonder," and he pointed to a little cove.

"She must be there then."

"There is no vessel there, large or small."

"But I left her there just before eight o'clock."

"Then she has gone to the bottom in deep water, as her mast even is not visible."

"Curses! some one has run off with her."

"My dear fellow, Lieutenant Brandon, by your own words, is unable to move than move with crutches, and he certainly could not get up anchor, set sail and run off with a vessel that had no stores on board, while as he did not suspect you of treachery he had no reason for so doing."

"But the sloop is not here," hissed Darrell.

"No, and this is the second time you have fooled me, so I think a month between decks in irons, will prevent you trying it a third time."

"You will not certainly arrest me, sir, for I have done no crime, and I swear to you I left the sloop here two hours ago."

"And only Mr. Brandon on board?"

"Yes, sir."

"And she has gone; well, she could not go without being seen from the decks of the half dozen vessels that lie at anchor down the harbor yonder, so we will board them and inquire, and woe be unto you if you are playing me false," and ordering Leo Lauderdale, who held the tiller, to steer for the nearest vessel a brig, Mayo Maynard relapsed into silence, while Darke Darrell followed now in the boats' wake, silent, savage and surprised utterly, for, as in the former case when Noel Brandon so mysteriously disappeared, he knew that he meant no trick in the delivery of the fugitive sailor up to the Government.

"Ho the brig!" shouted Mayo Maynard sternly, as the boat drew near the merchant craft.

"Ay ay, sir," responded a voice from the deck of the vessel.

"I am from the war cutter Scorpion and wish to board you."

"Ay ay, sir, come alongside," was the answer of the man, and in a tone that showed he had nothing to conceal.

"Are you the skipper of this vessel?" asked the young officer, as he sprung on deck, followed by Darke Darrell, and a stout man advanced toward them.

"I am, sir, at your service."

"How long have you been at anchor here?"

"Since sunrise this morning, sir, waiting my chance at the dock to unload."

"Have you seen any strange sail in here to-night?"

"I seen one that kinder looked suspicious to me, sir."

"What was it?"

"A sloop, trim as a Boston belle, and with canvas enough on her for double her tonnage, I judged by the high mast and long boom, gaff, and bowsprit, for she didn't have all set."

"What was her size?"

"Some thirty tons, maybe."

"Where was she heading?"

"I saw her first, when she came sneaking along under easy sail, as though she was looking for something, and then she passed on up into yonder cove, and next I seen her laying to alongside a small sloop I had had my eye on during the day, as a beauty."

"Ah! how long did she stay there?"

"Half an hour maybe, sir."

"And then?"

"The two sloops, the big one and the little one, came down the harbor together and disappeared seaward."

"What did I tell you, sir?" exultantly cried Darke Darrell.

"It looks as though the little sloop had been kidnapped, I admit; but who could have taken her?" answered Mayo Maynard.

"Why, captain, the big sloop was none other than skipper Vernon's Blue Bell, which was lying in this harbor when I came out with the Madcap, and—"

"You think he has come in chase and carried the little sloop back?"

"Yes, sir, either he has done so, or—"

"Or what?"

"That daring girl has."

"You refer to Miss Vernon?"

"Yes, sir, to Madcap Madge, the most remarkable woman I ever saw."

"I told you what a brave one she was, and how she had warned Noel Brandon, even while she was serving as your pilot, and now she has just helped him off again; but I'll yet have him, and the reward I will claim."

"I cannot doubt but that you meant to do as you said, after hearing the story of the skipper here, so I will permit you to go free, and should you capture Noel Brandon bring him to me and the reward is yours, for I am authorized to pay it."

"I will do so, sir, but would it not be well to get your cutter under way and start in chase, for they do not expect it, and naturally the two vessels will head directly for the Kennebec."

"Good reasoning, I think, or for the waters thereabout, and I will go on board the Scorpion and at once give chase."

"May I accompany you, sir?"

"No, for I fear you would but be a Jonah along and give us bad luck," answered Lieutenant Maynard, who did not like Darrell, but he added:

"If we capture the prisoner you shall have a share of the reward, and the rest go to my crew, for it is not fair to give it all to you."

"Besides, I can hardly believe that Noel Brandon would return to the neighborhood of his home and leave Boston, and you had better search the city for him."

Thanking the brig's skipper the young commander then departed on his way for the scorpion, which half an hour after was standing out of the harbor under a heavy pressure of sail, in chase of the two sloops, while Darke Darrell rowed shoreward in his skiff, a very disappointed man at the way in which matters had turned against him, and in favor of Noel Brandon.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE MADCAP OVERHAULED.

WHEN the two sloops reached open water, after leaving Boston harbor, the Blue Bell, which was leading, sailed close into the wind and allowed the Madcap to come to windward of her, and so near that conversation could easily be carried on from the two decks.

"Gaspard," called out Madge.

"Ay, ay, Lady Captain."

"I wish you to run the coast along to the Manhegan Island, and there await for me, if you arrive first, and if the Blue Bell reaches there before you, I will await your coming."

"Yes, miss."

"Run into one of the little harbors there, and keep the sloop hidden."

"Yes, miss."

"Now you can get there as soon as you like, while I will go into deep water and thus in to the island. Good-night," and with a wave of her hand Madge dismissed the little sloop, which forged ahead and held on down the coast, while the Blue Bell headed directly out to sea.

Gaspard saw no reason to drive the Madcap, as Madge had the Blue Bell on the run to Boston, so he held on under what canvas he had spread, and let the men turn in, excepting the man at the helm.

Just after dawn he came on deck, and his eyes fell upon a vessel not half a league astern, coming on under a pressure of sail.

He started, and called out to the man at the tiller:

"Fool! did you not see yonder craft?"

"No, sir; I did not look astern."

"Well, we have nothing to run for, unless she is a pirate, and she is not that—no, it is the Government cutter Scorpion, for I recognize her now; but your duty, as helmsman, when no one else held the deck, is to keep your eyes everywhere."

"Yes, sir," was the meek answer, and then Gaspard eyed the coming cutter.

"She comes on like a race-horse, and is evidently in chase of the sloop; but then, what for?"

"I've got nothing contraband on board, and let me see, I'll just tell the truth and say she was run off with, and I was sent after her and found her in Boston harbor, deserted, and am taking her home again."

Having made up his mind to the story he would tell, and which was nearly true in point of fact, he held quietly on his way, after telling his men just what he intended to say.

The cutter came along in the Madcap's wake, in a way that showed she was in earnest, and shortly after sunrise she was in hailing distance.

"Ho, the sloop!" cried Mayo Maynard.

"Ay, ay, the cutter!"

"What sloop is that?"

"The Madcap, of the Kennebec."

"Lay to, while I send a boat on board of you!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" and the Madcap was soon at a standstill.

Lowering away a boat, Mayo Maynard sprung into it, and the crew pulled rapidly for the sloop.

Gaspard met the officer at the side and politely asked him on board.

"Well, skipper, where are you from?"

"Boston, sir."

"Where bound?"

"Vernon's Haven, in lower Kennebec, sir."

"What cargo?"

"None, sir."

"Any passengers?"

"No, sir."

"Is not this the Madcap?"

"Yes, sir."

"Skipper Vernon?"

"The sloop belongs to Miss Madge, Skipper Vernon's daughter, sir, for she took her as a prize some short time ago."

"Ah! and Miss Madge is not on board?"

"No, sir, for the sloop was cut out from her harbor a few nights ago, and I started with my crew, to head her off at some port, and we caught her at Boston."

"Indeed! and who ran away with her?"

"That I do not know, sir; but we found her at anchor in Boston harbor and deserted, and we just set sail and started back with her."

"And the Blue Bell?"

Gaspard was quick-witted, and he saw that the officer was better posted in regard to the vessel than he pretended, so he said:

"Oh, she went on her regular coasting cruise, after landing us, sir."

This threw Mayo Maynard off his guard, for it did not look unreasonable, the story of Gaspard; but he asked:

"Did the Blue Bell take you to Boston?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Captain Vernon left you there?"

"Miss Madge did, sir, for the skipper was up in the country when the Madcap was cut out, and so Miss Madge started in chase with the Blue Bell."

"I see, and left five men on this little sloop: she had a large crew."

"You see, sir, she did not know how many were in the sloop, and she shipped a number of fishermen."

This too looked plausible, and Mayo Maynard asked then:

"And where did you say the Blue Bell went?"

"Portsmouth, I guess, sir, for she coasts from Cape Cod to the Penobscot."

"Yes, and Miss Madge is in command?"

"She thought, sir, she had better take a cargo back with her, as she was in these waters, and not have an empty cruise."

Mayo Maynard could see nothing wrong in all this, but how about the prisoner, Noel Brandon, whom Darke Darrell had said he had brought with him from the Kennebec?

He now wished that he had brought the man along.

After a moment of thought he said:

"My man, it is my duty to look over your vessel."

"Certainly, sir," and Gaspard led the way, and a thorough search of the little vessel was made, but with no success, as far as discovering anything of a suspicious nature was concerned.

Returning to the deck, Mayo Maynard asked suddenly:

"Do you know Noel Brandon, now a fugitive from justice, and late an officer of the navy?"

"I am not acquainted with him, sir, but I heard of him, and know that the cutter yonder came to the Kennebec in search of him."

"Suppose I tell you that the one who cut out your sloop, from Vernon's Haven, did so to carry Mr. Brandon to Boston to deliver him up to the Government, but when he went to get him, from on board the sloop, found the craft gone."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes, and the prisoner too."

"Then he must have left the sloop, sir, for there was no prisoner on board when I boarded her."

"Well, my man, I expected to find Mr. Brandon on board, and I will tell you now that there is a reward of ten thousand dollars for him, dead or alive, so if you run across him, you will know just what his capture is worth to you."

"That's a big sum, sir."

"It is indeed, and it will be paid promptly in gold."

"You do not think the prisoner could be on board the Blue Bell?"

"How could he get there, sir?"

"True; still I believe I will look the Blue Bell up, so good-by," and Mayo Maynard returned on board the cutter, which at once headed for Portsmouth, while the Madcap held on her way along the coast, Gaspard muttering to himself:

"Ten thousand dollars reward!"

"Why that's a fortune, and it's not to be thrown away, either."

"I'll talk it over with the boys."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

GASPARD'S GAME.

"MATES, did you hear what the cutter's captain said, about ten thousand dollars being offered for the lieutenant, dead or alive?"

So said Gaspard to his crew, after the sloop was on her way once more, and they were seated at breakfast.

"We heard him," answered several in chorus.

Now Gaspard was considered a true man, by the Skipper Vernon, and he was so trusted.

He had known him for some time, though he had not had him in his service but a short while, and he had shipped Melmer at the same time, and always found them both able seamen, trustworthy and good men under all circumstances.

But Gaspard was avaricious.

He loved gold more than all else and hoarded it up at all times, until he had accumulated quite a little sum.

He was hoping some day to run a craft of his own, and he wanted the money to purchase it with.

Here was a chance, for at one blow ten thousand dollars could be made.

Of course he did not expect to get it all, but it should be, if earned, long division on his side, and short division among the crew.

Ten thousand dollars was a fortune to him and it was worth struggling for.

He knew that the wounded officer was protected by the daughter of his captain, and that a split would follow; but there were other places to seek, should he give Noel Brandon up.

The more he thought over the matter the more he decided to act, and so, when all but the helmsman were seated at breakfast, he opened the subject by the question that commences this chapter.

"Now, shipmates, I don't think it is unreasonable in me to say I want that money, and I know it's generous on my part to offer to give you a share," he went on, and the crew listened most attentively to every word he uttered.

"Now the lieutenant has done a great wrong, for he killed his superior officer in a duel, and then he went to work, after being dismissed from the navy by his captain, and not only killed his captain, but robbed him of a large sum of money.

"Now this is why they want to capture and yard-arm him, and I do think it would be but right to help catch him, for such a man should not go free."

"It's true Captain Vernon wants to protect him, but that's on account of his daughter, who is doubtless in love with him, and it would hurt her sweet heart to see him strung up; but then I think it would be wrong to let her marry such a man, and I intend she shall not."

"Now you all know just how we make our living."

"It is hard work, dangerous work, and we are liable to get into trouble any day, and all for a little pittance of a few hundred a year."

"Now I'll take the lead in this matter, do all the thinking, take all the blame, and just turn Lieutenant Brandon over to the captain of the Scorpion."

"There are, with Melmer and the lads on the Blue Bell, just thirteen of us, and I will take four thousand dollars and give you all six thousand, which will make five hundred dollars for each of you twelve, and nothing to do more than to obey my orders."

"What do you say?"

Five hundred dollars was a big sum, especially for doing nothing, and the men looked at each other in a pleased kind of way, never thinking how readily Gaspard was grabbing the lion's share for really doing nothing more than they did, except to take the initiative.

"I says yes," cried one.

"You lead, I'll follow."

"I'm your lad, Gaspard."

"Shipmate, what you say is right, in my mind."

Such were the answers of the crew, and seeing that he had won them over, Gaspard said:

"We could do this alone, if we played our cards right; but I think we should let our other mates into the game, as they have the officer on board the Blue Bell, and we will."

"Now we'll head for Monhegan Island with all speed, wait until the Blue Bell arrives, and then I'll have a talk with Madcap Madge."

"She'll show her teeth, mate," said one.

"Yes, she'll never say die, for she's got nerve enough for an admiral."

"Well, we will be thirteen against her."

"There be two others who may take her part, not to speak of the wounded officer."

"Who are they?"

"Why, Sam, and Tap-room Tom, as they call that soak."

"The one an idiot and the other a drunkard; but even with them to aid the girl, and Brandon too, we are thirteen against four."

"You wouldn't harm the girl, Gaspard?"

"No, indeed; but she must let us alone."

"I will let her go with the idiot and Tap-room Tom, taking the Blue Bell, while we go in this sloop to look up the Scorpion, and get the gold for our prisoner."

"As we can no longer serve under Captain Vernon, we can go South with the sloop, and I can give you a berth with me, for I'll have enough, with this craft, to get me a good vessel."

"Now, lads, you know Gaspard's little game, and I intend to play it to win, and for all there is in it."

"What do you say?"

The men said but one thing, and that was that they were thoroughly in favor of the entire transaction, only they would not see Madge harmed, and she should certainly go free in the Blue Bell, along with the drunkard and Silly Sam.

This Gaspard was determined fully upon, and so the matter was decided, and the Madcap was pushed rapidly for her rendezvous with the Blue Bell, and then the trap was to be sprung, the game was to be taken, and the blood-money won.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MADCAP MADGE AND HER ALLIES.

AFTER running out to sea for some leagues, the Blue Bell felt that there was ample chance to avoid an enemy, and so was put on a northeasterly course by her Girl Captain.

Madge was anxious to reach the rendezvous as soon as she could, for she did not know how soon her father might wish the sloop, and she determined to get Noel Brandon safely concealed at the earliest moment it was possible to do so.

Her plan was to go to the rendezvous, and there give the Blue Bell over to Gaspard and his crew and have them return with all

speed to Vernon's Haven, and tell her father she would soon be back.

Then, in the Madcap, with only Silly Sam and Tom to aid her, she determined to seek some place of security, among several that she knew, where the wounded officer could remain in hiding until he was wholly well and able to look out for himself.

She had a talk with Noel, and he decided with her that this was the best course to pursue.

"But how about Tap-room Tom?" he asked.

"I have had some long talks with Tom, Mr. Brandon, and I see that he has changed for the better."

"He drinks, it is true, and I allow him so much each day, for I dare not do otherwise, but I cut down the allowance, and I believe he can be reformed."

"He likes you, says you are not guilty, and he would defend you with his life, while he says he owes his life to me and will be my slave if I wish."

"I therefore feel that I can trust him as thoroughly as I can Silly Sam, who is as true as steel."

"Yes, he is a noble fellow, and I agree with you about poor Tom Fletcher; but what a lot of trouble I am, and I cannot but feel that it would have been better to have gone to the yard-arm and had it all over."

"And thus die in ignominy, and for a crime which you say you did not commit?" indignantly answered Madge.

"True, I am innocent; only, wounded and helpless as I am, suffering continually, and putting you and my other true friends to such trouble and in constant peril, I feel like giving up, whereas if I could help myself I would never yield," and his splendid eyes flashed fire as he spoke.

"You must not give up as it is, nor do we intend to give you up."

"Your wound renders you almost helpless it is true, but then that is healing fast, and in a month or so you will be perfectly well, and then you can, in some disguise, solve the mystery of these fearful charges laid at your door."

"Miss Madge, you talk like an admiral, and I owe my life and all to you, and for your sake I will some day prove that I am indeed innocent," and his voice quivered as he spoke.

She held out her hand, in her frank, quick way, and then went on deck.

Tap-room Tom was at the tiller, for Madge gave him something to do to keep his mind off his misfortunes.

It was the day after leaving Boston, and no land was in sight, but the Blue Bell was skimming along flatly and heading toward the Kennebec, or a course that would bring her not far from it.

Tom looked better than he had for years.

The fright, of being so near to death, the long stay in the sea, and drinking good liquor, and in certain quantity, and at given times, as a medicine, was helping him.

Then too he had found in Madge a warm friend, Silly Sam treated him well, and Noel Brandon was kind to him, while the crew were not unfriendly.

All these circumstances made the poor drunkard seem like another being.

He smiled pleasantly and saluted, as Madge joined him, and said:

"Do you know I'm beginning to feel like my old self, Miss Madge, before rum had the mastery of me and made me do so many wicked things."

"I am glad to hear you say so, Mr. Fletcher for—"

"Mister Fletcher! how long since I have heard myself called by that name, and never before when it seemed so sweet."

"Of late years it has been Tap-room Tom, Tom the Drunkard, Drunken Tommy, Sot, Tipsy and Soak that I have been hailed with."

"Ah! me! I have much to answer for, Miss Madge, but I hope some day to be square again."

"I cannot give up drink right off, for it would kill me, but what you give me now I crave as a necessity, and do not pour down as I did from love of it."

"You are reforming me, Miss Madge."

"I am more than happy in hearing you say so, and I have now come to prove my trust in you by telling you a secret."

"Indeed, would I respect it, miss."

"Well, I intend to let all go on the Blue Bell, when we meet the Madcap, except Lieutenant Noel, Sam and yourself, and then we will run the little sloop to a safe hiding-place for the wounded officer, where he can remain until he gets well."

"A good idea, miss."

"Do you believe him guilty, Mr. Fletcher?"

"I do not, miss, for I have sat here at the tiller and watched his face, as he lay yonder, and I feel that, though he has sorrows, he has no great guilt in his heart!"

"And I can trust you to know where his hiding-place is, Mr. Fletcher?"

"You can trust me in everything," was the earnest reply.

"I thank you, and I will trust you," and Madge walked amidships to talk with Silly Sam, who was leaning over the windward bulwark, idly gazing out upon the ocean, while the crew were forward playing cards in a group.

"Sam, I have in my mind a place where we can leave Lieutenant Noel, and you and Tom and I are the only ones to know the secret."

"You think I can trust Tom?"

"As you can trust me, Miss Madge."

"Then I know he is as true as steel, for I could trust you with more than life," and Madge laid her little brown hand upon the young man's arm.

Silly Sam trembled at her touch, his face flushed, then paled, and then came from between his lips in a groan:

"God be merciful to me, a fool!"

"Why, Sam! what do you mean?" cried Madge, astounded at his strange manner and almost savage prayer.

"I mean that I am a fool, and as such can never have the hope of winning your love, Madge."

"But I'll not wrong you, only do not let me feel, or know that you love any one else," and the man looked into her eyes with a look that fairly startled her.

"Why, Sam, don't talk so, for I love no one, and I have no thought of so doing."

"Come, you are my strong ally in what I am doing, and I need all the aid you can give me, so don't get blue, but help me."

"I will do all in my power, Miss Madge," he said, regaining his former look and manner, and then the two talked together over the plan Madge had formed for the safety of Noel Brandon, and the Blue Bell sped on her way toward the rendezvous with the Madcap.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE BLUE BELL BROUGHT TO.

As she neared the mouth of the Kennebec river, the Blue Bell was headed in nearer the coast, so that when off Bald Head she was but a league from the shore.

It was nearing night, and the wind was blowing fresh, so that the fleet sloop was bowling along at a lively pace, when suddenly, out from the coast darted a vessel under full sail.

There was no disguising the fact that the stranger had already seen the sloop and was after her.

Tom was at the tiller of the Blue Bell, at the time the stranger ran into view, and called quickly to Madge, who was in the cabin.

Just as Madge stepped out of the cabin the sun touched the horizon, and its fading light fell full upon the stranger.

Did the sloop hold the course she then was on she would soon run right upon the strange sail, while, to escape her she must go off dead to seaward.

It appeared that the new-comer was a rattling good goer, for he came on well, and was spreading all the duck he could get up.

One glance at the vessel and Madge said quietly:

"It is the Scorpion, and we left her in Boston harbor, so I believe she has been in chase of us."

"Then it is all up," said Tom.

"Why?" coolly asked Madge.

"Well, she'll take us, and Master Noel will have to hang."

"I do not exactly see what can be done, Tom, for yonder vessel in this breeze and rough water can outfoot the Blue Bell, while,

if we held our own even, she is near enough to knock us to pieces with his guns, so we must let him board and try to fool him."

"I'll bet you do it, Miss Madge, if you lay out to trick him, for you've got more wisdom in your little head than I ever heard of a woman possessing, especially in work that is cut out for men to do."

Madge laughed and said quickly.

"Well, he will reach the sloop, that is certain."

"And will find Master Noel?"

"Not necessarily."

"You couldn't hide him on a ship o' the line from those sharp-eyed sea rovers," said Melmer.

"Well, we will see, and I have an idea I shall try."

"Yes, miss."

"The wind is on our starboard quarter now, and when the schooner orders us to lay to, we will run around into the wind and do so, and this will bring her up under the sloop's stern, where she will also lay to."

"Yes, miss."

"By that time it will be dark, and as it is cloudy the night will be very somber, and then I will try my little trick, and if it fails, why then we can do nothing more," and Madge made known just what thought had flashed through her mind, by which she hoped to outwit the crew of the Scorpion.

In the mean time the Scorpion was coming briskly on, heading on a course which would cause her either to cross the sloop's bows or run astern.

Upon her deck stood her handsome young commander and his officers, and they were admiring the pretty sloop as she walked over the waters like a thing of life.

The Scorpion had made a fine run, after parting with the Madcap, and learning from an armed cutter, just out of Portsmouth, that no vessel answering the Blue Bell's description was in that port, Mayo Maynard had held directly on along the coast.

He had just run in among a group of islands, when the lookout called from the mast-head.

"Sail ho!"

It did not take very long to discover that it was the Blue Bell, and the schooner was accordingly run inshore to a hiding-place, and there lay in wait until the sloop came within a league of her.

Then, setting sail she glided out rapidly upon her, and in such a way that she could cut her off from hiding in any of the innumerable coves and inlets along the coast, and where, without a skilled pilot Mayo Maynard dared not follow.

To drive her to sea then was his desire, and he knew that the Scorpion could run her down.

To his surprise the Blue Bell did not take flight but held directly on, so he felt that Madge could have no reason to avoid him, if, as Gaspard had told him, she was in command of the sloop.

So on he held until within a quarter of a mile of the Blue Bell, when a shot was sent across her bows to command her to lay to.

The Blue Bell promptly swept around and then lay upon the sea awaiting the pleasure of the cruiser.

It was now dark, and after running up to within a cable's length of the sloop, Mayo Maynard ordered the Scorpion brought to, and a boat lowered.

Into the boat he got with half a dozen sailors, and was pulled rapidly over to the sloop.

Madge met him at the gangway, and said pleasantly:

"We meet again, Captain Maynard."

"Lieutenant Maynard, Miss Vernon, not captain yet, if you please," he said as he held out one hand, and raised his cap with the other.

"You command the schooner, and hence are acting captain."

"And am I to call you Captain Madge, as you seem to command the sloop?"

"As you please, for I am the Girl Commander of the Blue Bell."

"And bound home, I suppose, Captain Madge?"

"Yes, sir."

"And where from, may I ask?"

"How inquisitive you naval officers are; but I do not mind telling you that we left Boston last."

"And may I ask the object of your voyage?"

"Pardon me, Miss Vernon, but I am forced to do an unpleasant duty."

"Ah! then you have not found Lieutenant Brandon yet?"

"No, I have not, and it is what I have heard of your aiding him that causes me to watch you so, for I am free to confess that he was well-nigh in my power, brought to Boston in your sloop, and yet escaped me."

Unwittingly his words gave Madge a clew as to what he knew.

She saw that he was aware that her sloop had been stolen, and Noel Brandon taken in it to Boston, so she felt that she had to be guarded.

He had doubtless run across the Madcap somewhere, and Gaspard had told him of the craft having been cut out, and yet he could not have told him what had become of Noel Brandon, she argued in her own mind.

"Oh, yes, some one stole my sloop, and so I had to give chase, and tracked her to Boston, and found her, sending her home under a crew of five men; but you say that Mr. Brandon was taken in the Madcap to Boston?" and Madge put on a look of well-feigned surprise.

"So I was told, and believe, though when you found your sloop she was deserted."

"Yes, she had no crew on her," said Madge, jumping at the conclusion, from the officer's remark, that Gaspard had so told him.

"I knew your interest in Brandon, Miss Madge, and therefore held the idea that you had run off with him to save his neck."

"Lieutenant Maynard, I pray you understand me."

"I believe Mr. Noel Brandon guiltless of the crimes he is accused of, and I would save his life that he may prove himself so: for dead men tell no tales, true or false, and if hanged then he could prove nothing; but I must tell you frankly I did not take Mr. Brandon from the Hermit Sailor's hut, when you were last in the river, as I was accused of doing, nor did I carry him to Boston, as you seem to think."

"I followed the sloop there, yes, and I am now on my way home, as is also the Madcap, though you are at liberty to search my vessel from keel to truck."

"My duty will compel me to do so, though I believe your words that Mr. Brandon is not on board."

"I didn't say he was not on board," muttered Madge *sotto voce* while aloud she remarked:

"I hope my brother proved to be a good pilot, Captain Maynard?"

"Most excellent, I assure you, and I have made a request for a middy's berth for him, though he said he cared not for it."

"No, I hardly think he will accept it."

"Well, I enjoyed his society very much, for he's very original, and is a superb pilot, wonderfully full of nerve for a boy of his years; but now, Miss Madge, I will give the sloop a looking over, as a matter of form to do my duty, and then bid you farewell, but as I may be on the coast for a short while, I hope you will come if I signal for a pilot to run us into a harbor."

"I will come with pleasure, sir; or, if I should not be able to do so, my father or brother will, and should you land I will be happy to see you at our cottage and have you meet my father."

Mayo Maynard thanked Madge for her invitation and then, with his coxswain carrying a lantern, he proceeded to search the sloop.

Into the hold they went, looking where a rat could hardly have found a hiding-place, for with all of his trust in the girl, he could not drive from his mind the belief that she knew more of Noel Brandon's whereabouts than any one else.

The cabin was next fully overhauled, then forward between decks, and the young officer at last said:

"I have quieted my conscience, Miss Madge, by doing my duty, for somehow, in spite of all, I had a belief that Noel Brandon was in this sloop."

"You made a thorough search, I hope sir."

"A most complete one."

"And I trust you are convinced that he is not here?"

"I am."

"Suppose you examine the topsails, sir, for a man could easily hide there, or about the deck?"

"Don't be satirical, Miss Madge, because you have the power; but I am glad not to find Brandon here, and I bid you good-evening and *bon voyage*."

Madge grasped the outstretched hand of the young officer, whom she liked, and could not but admire, and springing into his boat Mayo Maynard was rowed back to the schooner.

"Now we will go on our course once more, Mr. Melmer, and you, Sam, go with Tom and take Mr. Brandon back into the cabin, for his position is by no means a pleasant one," and Madge stepped to the tiller, while Sam and Tom walked forward and bending over the lee bow began to draw in hard upon something that hung over there.

In a moment up came a hammock, and in it was Noel Brandon, drenched to the skin, but safe.

Madge had conceived the bright idea of lowering the wounded officer over the side in a hammock, and though the wash of the seas broke over him often, he was safe, and in the darkness the searchers, though within a few feet of him, had never suspected the maiden's clever ruse to save him from capture, and Mayo Maynard returned on board the Scorpion willing to take oath that Noel Brandon was not on the Blue Bell, and still, in his own mind rested the suspicion that he had been tricked by the fair maid of the Kennebec—but how? Ah! that was just it.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A MUTINY.

MADGE VERNON was anxious to keep her eye upon the Scorpion, until she threw her off the scent, and so she held on, as though to run into the Kennebec, while the cutter kept on her course seaward.

When within a mile of the coast Madge saw that the Scorpion had wholly disappeared from sight, so she had the Blue Bell squared away from Manhegan Island.

It was just before dawn that the Blue Bell ran in toward the island, and, acquainted with the locality, for she had several times been there with her father, the maiden took the helm and, under greatly reduced sail, stood slowly into a small cove.

It was a small, basin-like harborage, with high rocky shores, covered with hardy pine trees, and the very place in which a small vessel could seek refuge.

A light in the further end of the harbor showed that some craft was there, and it could be none other Madge thought, than the Madcap; but Silly Sam took the skiff, and, with muffled oars went to find out.

In a short time he returned on board the Blue Bell with the remark:

"It is the Madcap, and all are asleep on board of her."

"Gaspard suspected no danger here, I suppose; but we won't rouse them, for I wish to have the Blue Bell well on her way toward home by sunrise," said Madge.

So the sloop was headed in, and lowering sail glided alongside of the Madcap, a hail from Melmer having aroused the sleepers, who now were on the alert to receive the Blue Bell's crew.

"Well, Gaspard, you arrived all right, I see," said Madge.

Gaspard gave a warning look to his immediate crew, and then answered:

"Yes, Lady Captain, but we were brought to by the Scorpion."

"No! why Captain Maynard did not speak of this."

"You saw him too?"

"Yes."

"And he boarded your vessel?"

"Oh, yes, and made a thorough search."

"My God! and found the prisoner?" cried Gaspard, seeing his anticipated gold-grab dying away.

"Oh, no, he did not find him."

"Yet he was on the sloop?"

"Certainly."

"He made a poor search then, for you couldn't hide a cat in the sloop where I could not find it."

"Don't be so sure, Gaspard; but certain it is that Lieutenant Brandon was not discovered, and he is now safe on board."

"Well, I'm delighted," said Gaspard with a sigh of relief; and he was delighted, for now he could get his blood-money.

"Miss Madge," he said in a whisper, glancing around to see that the crew of the Madcap had gotten all of the men of the Blue Bell off to one side, all but Silly Sam and Tom, and they were standing amidships, talking together.

"Well, Gaspard?"

"Do you know that ten thousand dollars reward is offered for the lieutenant, dead or alive?"

"Yes, Gaspard, and what of it?"

The answer and question came so abruptly that it quite nonplussed the man.

"Well, nothing much of it, only that the men are talking of it."

"What men?"

"The crew of the Madcap."

"Ah! how did they know it?"

"Captain Maynard told them."

"Well; what of it?"

"They seem to think, as they could get a fortune for giving the lieutenant up to the Government to hang, that he should be willing to pay liberally not to hang."

"Gaspard, Mr. Brandon is a most generous man, and he has already urged upon me a large sum with which to reward you all, but I took only a small sum for each man, and that ends it."

"How ends it?"

"If the men are not satisfied, they can get a berth elsewhere."

"But how much is the sum they are to receive?"

"You and Melmer are to get a month's pay as officers, and the men as much each as a seaman's wages."

"It is not enough."

"It will have to be, for I shall not allow Mr. Brandon to pay more."

"There will be trouble, I fear, miss."

"Then wait until it begins before you croak, Gaspard, and now get your men, remove Mr. Brandon on board the Madcap, and then take your crew and set sail at once in the Blue Bell for Vernon's Haven, telling my father I shall soon return, and am safe and well."

"And the prisoner?"

"He goes with me."

"Well, I'll see what can be done, and let you talk with some of the men, miss?"

"I do not wish to talk with them, Gaspard, and so tell them, for they do not wish to cause trouble."

"Now, do as I bid you!"

Gaspard went forward, and Madge saw him talking earnestly with the crews of the two vessels, for all were now congregated in one compact group.

Then she saw them start to come on board the sloop, for the Madcap lay alongside of a bank.

"They mean mischief, I fear."

"Here, Sam, you and Mr. Fletcher come aft quick, and arm yourselves," she said, in a loud whisper.

Her words reached the ears of Noel Brandon, and rising, he seized his crutches, grasped a sword in one hand and a pistol in the other, and began to go up the companionway, just as Tom stepped in and took several weapons out of a locker.

"What is up, Tom?" calmly asked Noel Brandon.

"The men are in a nasty humor, sir, and mean mischief."

"I guess they wish to give me up for the reward offered; but they will find I am not one to submit tamely," and Noel Brandon continued on his painful way up to the deck.

The crew had now come upon the Blue Bell in a mass and Gaspard was at their head.

There was but one that appeared absent out of the thirteen, and that one was Melmer, a quiet, determined man, who had little to say, yet was withal a fine seaman.

"Lady Captain, I've had a talk with the men, and they say that the lieutenant must surrender himself."

"I will do so, if it will save trouble for this lady, for I see that you brutes mean mischief," said Noel Brandon, speaking in a calm, distinct voice.

"They mean deviltry—that I will not submit to, and I warn them not to press me," sternly responded Madge.

"We mean business, and we are going

to have the lieutenant, dead or alive, so come on lads, and take him!"

The words were uttered by Gaspard, and a cheer answered them.

"I warn you back!" cried Madge; but her voice was lost in the cheer and rush, and then came a shot, another, a third, the clash of steel against steel, and in a moment the desperate mutineers had swept upon the little band of defenders, and the affair was over.

Tom had been bodily seized and hurled down the companionway, Silly Sam had been knocked senseless, but not until he had severely punished his enemies, and by sheer force of numbers Noel Brandon had been driven into the cabin, where Madge was seized and borne.

Both Madge and Noel Brandon had fired upon the mutineers, and their number had been depleted by Noel, but on they pressed and it was not strange that a moment's time ended the unequal conflict.

Hurled back though he was, off from his crutches, Noel Brandon had retained the grasp upon his sword, and backing up in a corner of the cabin, prepared to defend his life at any cost.

But he could not get a sweep for his blade in the small cabin, and rushing bodily upon him, the mutineers soon had him securely bound.

"He is ours, and three less to divide the thousands with, so that I will come in for a larger share."

"But how he did fight, and that girl too."

"Why, she's a deadly foe when aroused, and but for surprising them, they would not have been so easily taken."

"But the prisoner is mine, and the gold I will have before long."

"Now to let Madge Vernon take the Blue Bell and with that idiot and drunkard, go home, while we take our prize to find the Scorpion, which I am sure cannot be many leagues away, as I sighted her yesterday inshore toward the Kennebec."

And, having arranged his plan, Gaspard soon carried it out, excepting when he told Melmer to take the men on the Madcap and get up sail.

"I go with the Blue Bell, Gaspard," was the quiet reply.

"What do you mean, Melmer, that we shall take the Blue Bell instead of the smaller sloop?"

"No, I mean that I want no blood-money, and I shall go with the little sloop and Captain Madge."

"Ah! you go with the Lady Captain?"

"I do."

"Well, it leaves that much more gold to go around, so I do not care."

"Get the Madcap under sail, lads, while I bring this Tartar lieutenant on board and clap the irons on him, for I know where Skipper Vernon keeps his steel bracelets."

Then he went below and soon returned with handcuffs and chains, and Noel Brandon was securely ironed and taken on board the Madcap.

"Good-by, Miss Madge, and feel that I appreciate all that you have done for me," called out Noel Brandon, as they bore him from the Blue Bell to the deck of the Madcap.

Madge made no reply, but waved her hand, while Sam and Tom stood near, and Melmer walked up and joined them, saying:

"This is an infamous shame, and all the work of that gold-mad Gaspard; but I go with you, lady."

"I shall be glad to have you, for you have proven yourself a true man," answered the young girl in a choking voice.

Poor Master Noel will go to the yard-arm," said Silly Sam, who stood near, the blood streaming down his face from a gash in the head.

"Poor fellow; it is better that one like me should die than such a man," muttered Tom half-aloud.

"Or a fool like me," added Sam.

"He must not die," was the sudden remark of Madge, and she added quickly:

"Come! get sail on the Blue Bell and he may yet be saved."

Hardly had the Madcap gotten under way, when the Blue Bell's sails went up, like magic, and taking the helm, Madge headed her seaward.

The hight of her topsail caught the wind

over the pine tops sooner and stronger than did the Madcap, and she glided past the little sloop, darting out into open water a cable's length ahead of her.

"Now for home!" said Madge, and away flew the large sloop, while the Madcap went at a slower pace shoreward, for Gaspard was sure he would find the Scorpion within a couple of leagues of the coast, and, that he might be sighted by the cutter, if near, he had lights run up to the mast-head, for he now felt sorry that he had allowed the Blue Bell to go, as he did not doubt but that Madge meant mischief, from the way she sped away from the island under all that the sloop could carry, and he had reason to know that the brave girl was one to be dreaded and avoided.

"Curses on the luck!" he muttered, adding:

"But it is done, and my only hope now is to find the Scorpion, and that done my fortune is made, and I seek other scenes in this fleet little craft, and before long will tread the deck of my own vessel, and thus reach the dream of my life."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

TAKEN.

THERE was no denying it that Gaspard was uneasy, and the cause of his uneasiness was Madcap Madge.

He cursed himself over and over again for allowing her to go free until he had gone out and hunted up the Scorpion.

She had not ranted, nor flown into a temper, she had not threatened, but simply took matters as though there was no help for it.

She certainly had not been unnerved, for she had fired coolly, and with a deadly aim, when they had rushed upon her, and the idea filled his mind that she had leveled her pistol at him, for the bullet just grazed his cheek and sunk into the brain of the man immediately behind him.

He shuddered to feel how near he had been to death.

She had so quietly slipped away, and yet with such speed, that he felt that her fertile brain had hit upon some plan to rescue his prisoner.

He knew that her father could collect a score of iron-hearted seamen along the coast within half a day's time, and these upon the Blue Bell, thoroughly armed, would be more than a match for his crew on the Madcap.

Then there was another thing to look to, and that was that the Blue Bell could outrun the Madcap, either in a light or heavy breeze, and the chances to escape were thin.

So Gaspard already began to suffer under the weight of the load he carried.

But he could do but one thing and he did it.

That was to cruise slowly along the coast, hoping to find the Scorpion.

If he should not do so, and he caught sight of the Blue Bell coming in pursuit of him the next afternoon, he would crowd on all sail for Portland and deliver his prisoner up there to some vessel-of-war, trusting to get his reward at a later day.

So Gaspard kept every man on board on the lookout for the Scorpion, through the remainder of the night, and, as the daylight appeared all were in hopes of seeing the longed-for vessel-of-war.

But the day wore away, and, standing along the coast, the Madcap was off the mouth of the Kennebec, and a couple of leagues offshore, when a sail was sighted over an island top.

A cheer was given, for it was seen not to be the Blue Bell, and soon after the Scorpion shot into view.

Then a wild cheer broke from those on the deck of the Madcap, and the little vessel was headed to meet the larger one, a signal at once being run up to the mast-head.

It looked very much, by the way that Mayo Maynard haunted the vicinity of the Kennebec in his vessel, that he had an idea that he might yet find Noel Brandon somewhere there.

As he saw the Madcap he determined to at once give chase, for he recognized her, wondered what she was doing coming from a point beyond her destination, the Kennebec river.

Anyhow he meant to have another interview with her skipper and see if he could not engage him as a coast pilot for awhile.

for he had no one on board that understood those waters well.

He was somewhat surprised therefore to see the sloop head for him, and also run up a signal for him to come on as quickly as possible.

Spreading more sail, he moved the Scorpion on, and in half an hour's time was within hail of the little vessel.

"Ho, the sloop!" he called out.

"Ahoy the Scorpion!" answered Gaspard, wholly delighted at the success of his plot for gold.

"Well, send a boat alongside."

"Better send a boat to the sloop, sir, as I have a prize for you."

"A prize?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is it?"

"A prisoner."

"Hail who?"

"The one you are in search of."

"Noel Brandon?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ay, ay, I will come on board myself," and soon after Mayo Maynard was on his way to board the Madcap.

His face was pale, and he seemed a trifle nervous, for he felt for the man who had once been his friend.

The two had served together, as midshipmen, on the same frigate, and he had always liked Noel Brandon, though he often feared that his hot temper would some day get him into trouble.

It pained him now to have to be the captor of his old-time friend, yet he must do his duty as an officer in all things.

So he boarded the sloop and was met by the cheerful face of Gaspard.

"Well, sir, you seem delighted over the prospect of getting your blood money," he said sternly, as the man greeted him, "for I suppose it is the offer of the reward that makes you so happy."

"I have earned the money, captain."

"You have the prisoner, Mr. Noel Brandon on board?"

"I have, sir."

"You are sure there is no mistake?"

"There is no mistake, Maynard, for I am here in irons, and in agony mental and physical," called out a voice from the cabin.

"Ah, Brandon, it is indeed you, and I feel most deeply for you in the trouble you have brought upon yourself," said Mayo Maynard kindly, entering the cabin.

"I am the football of fate, Maynard, and circumstantial evidence accuses me and will hang me; but I am not guilty, I pledge you, of the crimes thrust upon me."

"God grant it, and that you can prove it, poor Noel."

"I have no proof; I am wounded, helpless as you see, and I must suffer."

"So be it, I accept my fate."

"Well, I will make you as comfortable as I can, for it is all I can do for you."

"Here, fellow, remove these irons from this gentleman, and how dare you handcuff and chain a wounded man?"

"I did not want him to escape, sir."

"You must be an arrant coward to fear a man crippled as he is; but how is it that I find you the captive of this man, Brandon, when only a few days ago I boarded this sloop and he knew nothing of you."

"Your offer of the reward made him treacherous, Maynard, and he hunted me down, and here I am."

"Well, he will get the reward, and may every dollar of it be a curse to him," was the blunt rejoinder of Mayo Maynard, and the irons having been removed from the prisoner, the boat's crew were called and he was carried to the boat.

"Now, fellow, I will give you a receipt for your prisoner, and you can go to Boston and collect your reward from the Government officer."

"Can you not give me the gold now?" whined Gaspard.

"No, I cannot, for United States cruisers don't carry fortunes around with them such as a pirate might have."

"Give me pen, ink and paper, and you can draw your blood-money on what I write for you."

Gaspard obeyed, and after writing the receipt, Mayo Maynard followed Noel Brandon into the boat waiting alongside, and was rowed rapidly toward the Scorpion, while

the little sloop spread on all sail and put away for Boston, the traitor crew of the Madcap anxious to collect the money they had earned through their treachery to their skipper and the prisoner.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE SIGNAL ANSWERED.

FEELING deep sympathy for the dashing, daring young officer who had been his comrade in years before, and wishing to make his latter days as comfortable as he could, Mayo Maynard had Noel Brandon taken to his own cabin, and there placed under the care of the cutter's surgeon.

The young commander had not the remotest doubt but that a speedy trial and execution would follow the capture of the fugitive sailor.

The chain of evidence seemed so strong against him, in fact the actual proof of his guilt, both in the murder and robbery of his captain, and then his flight, that there seemed no escape for him.

He had to go before a court-martial of old and stern officers, and mercy in their hearts to one thus accused, and bearing the rank of a lieutenant on his shoulders, would never be known, and Noel Brandon, brave, aristocratic, proud and a gentleman would have to hang like a dog.

"I will have the surgeon properly care for you, Brandon, and you shall be made as comfortable as I can make you," said Mayo Maynard kindly, when Noel Brandon had been borne into the cabin of the schooner.

"I thank you, Lieutenant Maynard, and I appreciate the struggle in your heart between duty and kindness toward me."

"But I have a great favor to ask."

"Well, Noel, anything that I can grant," answered Mayo Maynard.

"It is that you permit me to see my sister, Joyce."

"Your sister?"

"Yes, for my parents I do not believe, in fact I am sure, would not see me; but Joyce believes me innocent, and I have some parting instructions I can give to no one else, and they are important."

"If I go directly to Boston, you know what will follow, and I do not wish to ask my poor sister to come there and be near me in my last hours, so I beg you to allow me to see her now."

"It is certainly not an unreasonable request, Brandon, and—"

"We are but a few leagues from my home, and you can run in, signal for a pilot and one will come out to you, and the delay will not be greater than a day at furthest."

"Will you do this for me, Lieutenant Maynard?"

"You wish your sister to come on board the cutter to see you?"

"Assuredly."

"I will do as you ask, Brandon, and I can signal the sloop to return and give me a pilot."

"No, no, I would owe no favor to those men who betrayed me."

"There are fishermen along the coast who know these waters well, and some one of them will come out if you signal for them."

"The signal is three guns a minute apart, and repeated after ten minutes if none appear, with a red flag at the fore."

"All right, Brandon, I will see to it, and in the mean time the surgeon will dress your wound properly, and my servant can improve your appearance, so that you will be more presentable," and the kind-hearted lieutenant left the cabin and gave the necessary orders to his subordinates to carry out his wishes as regarded Noel Brandon.

Those on the sloop, now a league distant, were surprised to see the cutter suddenly change her course and head in toward the shore, at a point not very far from Brandon Hall.

Slowly, under light sail, the Scorpion went shoreward, and her officers and crew stood upon her decks admiring the wild and picturesque scenery.

When within half a league of the dangerous coast, a puff of white smoke came from her bows, and the deep boom of a heavy gun echoed along the rocky shores.

Again it was repeated, and again.

The sound reached the ears of one who was pacing to and fro before the Vernon cottage.

It was Madge Vernon, and she started, scissed her glass and ran to the lookout on the cliff.

Her face was pale and anxious, and she started as her eyes fell upon the cutter, and then upon the sloop far away in the distance.

"God have mercy! it is too late, for the sloop has met the Scorpion and given him up, and it will do no good for father, Sam and Tom to come with the fishermen they are searching for."

"But the Scorpion is firing for a pilot, that is certain."

The red flag is at her peak.

"What does it mean?"

"Well, I will go out to her, but I am sure that Noel Brandon is a prisoner on board."

"Hark! she fires again," so saying Madge turned and ran hastily back to the cottage.

"Phillis, tell father, Sam and Tom, as they arrive with men to await my coming, for there is no telling what may occur to need their services."

"I am going out to the cutter-of-war to serve as a pilot, and say to them that the sloop found the Scorpion and gave up their prisoner."

"Yes, missy, but—"

"I have no time now, Phillis, so do not detain me," and Madge bounded away down to the shore of the little harbor, sprung into her surf skiff and went flying away over the waters out toward the Scorpion, now lying a mile off-shore.

"There comes a pilot, sir," called out Leo Lauderdale, as the surf-skiff was descried coming out from under the land shadows.

"Yes, and it is Madcap Madge, the fair young Pilot of the Kennebec, and none better need we ask."

"I wish I could solve the mystery regarding that beautiful and strange girl," said Mayo Maynard.

Then he added:

"Perhaps Noel Brandon can tell me."

So down to Noel Brandon he went, and asked:

"Brandon, a pilot is coming off, and it is that beautiful creature, known as Madcap Madge Vernon; now just who is that strange girl?"

Noel Brandon had been shaved and neatly attired, his wound had been dressed skillfully by the surgeon, he had eaten a good meal, and was feeling well, though his haggard face showed that he had been a great sufferer in all his wanderings.

"Lieutenant Maynard, I know nothing of the girl, more than that the family came here years ago, and none knew from where."

"There are stories told of her father being a smuggler, yet I can hardly believe it, though he owns his vessel and his cruises are mysterious."

"My idea is that he has known better days, and came here to live in poverty away from those who had been his friends in the past."

"That is all that I know of them other than that Madge Vernon has been a true friend to me, and I shall never forget her, while I believe her as true a little woman as lives in the world."

"She seems to revel in a wild life of danger, and she has a wonderful influence over those with whom she comes in contact, while she will do any deed of recklessness that a man dare do."

"More I cannot tell you of her, for I know nothing more."

"She is indeed a wonderful girl, and she interests me deeply; but I must go on deck and meet her, as she must be near by this time."

"You wish, as I understand it, to run in to the anchorage near Brandon Hall, and send for your sister to come on board?"

"Yes; if you ask it, Madge will go after her."

"I will," and Mayo Maynard went on deck to find Madge just coming on board.

She was neatly dressed, wore a becoming little tarpaulin, was pale, but looked at perfect ease and very beautiful.

She bowed to Mayo Maynard, and said in her sweet way:

"You signaled for a pilot, Captain Maynard?"

"Yes, Miss Madge, I wish to run into the anchorage near Brandon Hall."

"I will pilot you there, sir."

"I am glad that you came off to us, for

we know that we can trust you, and there is a delicate mission I wish to ask of you."

"Well, sir?"

"I have on board, as prisoner, Mr. Noel Brandon—" and Mayo Maynard looked straight into the lovely face before him.

But not a change of color came, not a muscle quivered, and she met his eyes squarely.

"He is to be taken to Boston where I fear a sad fate awaits him, and he is anxious to see his sister, so I have run in to have her come on board and meet him."

"Now will you go to Brandon Hall and ask her to accompany you here?"

Madge glanced around at the skies, then at the sea, and shook her head ominously; but she answered:

"Yes, I will go, but a storm is threatening and these are dangerous waters for your vessel."

"It looks hazy, but the storm, if it comes, will not break for hours, perhaps not until late at night."

"I will risk it, sir."

"Shall I take the helm?"

"If you please," and the young officer escorted his fair pilot to the wheel, and under her guidance the Scorpion went on her perilous way among the dangerous rocks that here threatened destruction upon all sides, did not the one at the wheel know the circuitous channel.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IN THE DEVIL'S CALDRON.

"Do you see yonder large circle of reefs, Lieutenant Maynard?" asked Madge, as she skirted around what appeared to be a rocky wall sunken under water.

"Yes, it is a most remarkable formation."

"At very low tide, before a storm especially, nearly the whole reef is visible, and it forms, as you see, a circle, half a mile in diameter."

"There are two breaks in it which this cutter can go through, and were it high tide now, we could cut off a league in distance by doing so; but I'm afraid there is not water enough now, so circle around it."

"It is best, for that is a fearful place for a ship."

"It is, indeed, and in a storm it presents a most awful and dangerous appearance, and which has given to it the name of the Devil's Caldron."

"I should think it was fittingly named."

"You would think so did you see it in a storm, and from present appearances you are likely to do so."

"You think a storm is brewing?"

"I know it, but we have ample time to run in, and I know these waters so well you need have no fear for your vessel, blow as it may."

The calm confidence in her powers completely won the heart of Mayo Maynard, and he gazed at the young girl with intense respect, as she guided the cutter on her way to the haven of Brandon Hall, and which haven was only safe as an anchorage when the wind was from certain directions.

A run of an hour and the anchor was dropped near shore, while Madge hastily landed and walked away toward Brandon Hall.

To her joy she met Miss Brandon at the large gateway leading into the park, and with a cry Joyce threw herself into her arms.

"Oh, Madge, what has happened?"

"As we walk to the shore, Joyce, I will tell you all, for you must come with me, as your brother is on the cutter, and has sent for you."

"I will go, and at once," and the two started together, Madge telling Joyce all that had occurred as they walked along, adding:

"It was my intention to raise a crew of fishermen and pursue the Madcap, and take your brother from his captors, and father and two others went along the coast to find the men, most of whom are away just now; but I saw the Scorpion, and ran out to her, and found that the sloop discovered her, and gave your brother up."

"Then there is no hope?"

"There is, but I shall say no more."

"Madge, what peril would you face now for my poor brother's sake?"

"I will say no more than that I have not given up hope, and to-night you will know all."

"Now, while you go down to the shore, I will turn off here and go to my home."

"The cutter cannot leave without me, and I will be back within three hours at furthest."

"Madge, you have some daring game to play to save my brother."

Madge smiled grimly, waved her hand and walked rapidly away through a path in the forest.

Joyce Brandon in the mean time walked down the hillside to the waiting boat.

Leo Lauderdale met her, raised his cap politely, and asked:

"Where is our fair pilot?"

"She had to go to her home, she said, but would return as soon as it was possible."

Upon arriving on board Midshipman Lauderdale explained regarding Madge, while Joyce entered the cabin and threw herself into her brother's arms.

What was said none knew, for they were alone together, and, as long as Madge did not reappear, Mayo Maynard would not break in on the interview.

Anxiously the young officer paced the deck, for he now realized that the predictions of the Girl Pilot would be verified.

There came to his ears the distant roll of thunder, the sea beat mournfully upon the rocks, and the skies were becoming overcast, while but a cat's-paw of wind was blowing.

Night was but an hour away, and the storm breaking from seaward, would have the cutter upon the lee shore, and the end would be total wreck and death to all.

"Would Madge return?"

Surely she would not desert them. In his anxiety he went below and questioned Joyce Brandon.

"She will come," was the answer.

"She will not fail you, Maynard," said Noel.

"But the storm is rising rapidly, and I have half a mind to fire for a pilot to come off, in case she should not return."

"It would be best, for I tell you frankly, Maynard, if this storm, coming from seaward, breaks upon you in this vicinity the hangman will never put his noose around my neck, and every one on board this vessel will go down with me."

"Pilots are scarce on this coast, but you might signal for one, in case Madge should be detained."

The ominous words of Noel Brandon fell like a knell upon the ears of Mayo Maynard, and he hastened on deck and gave orders to fire a gun for a pilot.

Loud boomed the gun; and again and again it resounded, but no boat was seen putting off.

"There she comes!" shouted Ray Raymond, and down the hillside Madge was seen coming at a leisurely pace.

"Tell Miss Brandon she must return now, Lauderdale," said Mayo Maynard.

The message was delivered, and soon after blinded by her tears, Joyce Brandon almost staggered upon deck, for she felt that she had bidden farewell to her brother forever.

Silently Mayo Maynard aided her into the boat, accompanying her himself, and Madge met them as they landed.

"Farewell, Miss Brandon, and hope against hope," said Mayo Maynard, his voice quivering.

"Yes, Joyce, *hope is the word*," whispered Madge, and kissing her she sprung toward the boat.

"We thought you had deserted us, Miss Madge."

"Oh no, sir, I never break my word."

"This looks very black for us."

"It does, but I know the channels and the cutter is in no danger unless she loses her sticks," was the cool reply.

As Madge reached the deck of the cutter the crew received her with a cheer, and with a bow she walked to her post.

"Get up anchor, please, and reef down the mainsail and jib, for it is all that she will stand when the blow comes, and have the foresail and staysail ready for use also, reefed close."

In the quietest way she gave her orders, and Maynard reissued them in a loud voice.

"Batten down hatches, put all movable things below decks, house your topmasts, and double lash your guns, for this is to be a fearful storm, Captain Maynard, and you do not wish to hamper the cutter in the least."

The orders were issued and quickly obeyed and under a mere breath of wind the cutter moved out toward open water.

The heavens were now utterly black, and from seaward came the storm, looking like a moving mountain of water, threatening to wash away the earth.

The sun had set and darkness rested upon the sea, but far away up on the cliff a white-robed form was seen, daring the elements to watch the cutter's struggle for life.

It was Joyce Brandon.

Suddenly, out of the clouds of inky darkness came a fiery serpent of flame, and the peal of thunder that followed rocked the sea.

Then the winds swept down in fury, the waters rose to meet them, and the Scorpion's battle for life had begun.

At the same moment there flared up along the rocky coast three separate lights, and over the hilltops came the glare of a red light, while close to the shore a blue light was visible.

"What do those fires and lights mean?" shouted Mayo Maynard in the ear of Madge, who stood grasping the wheel, aided by two strong men.

"They are what I ordered to-day when I went home—lights to aid me, for this is a black night; but they guide me well."

"Thank God! you were most thoughtful."

"I knew how it would be."

And on bounded, swerved, dived the cutter, through walls of water, snowy foam, and with the winds howling over her.

Every man stood at his post, every man knew dangers surrounded them, though they could not see them, and all depended upon the strange girl who held their lives in her little hands.

"My God! the rocks were not twenty feet distant on either side of us then," cried Mayo Maynard, as he saw walls of water upon either quarter.

"The pass is a narrow one, sir, for we are in the Devil's Caldron," was the reply.

"Good Heaven! why did you come here on such a night?"

"I came, sir, for a purpose."

"You saw to-day the reef-circle, and you can now judge where you are."

"Those lights guided me in, and they will guide me out."

"It is but a short run from here to the lee of an island where the cutter can ride in safety, and there I will go, but upon one condition."

"Name it!"

"That you pledge your word to release Noel Brandon as soon as your vessel is in safety."

"Great God! I cannot do this!" groaned Mayo Maynard.

"Then I swear to you, Captain Maynard, I shall not again touch the wheel but let your vessel and all on board go to destruction unless you release the prisoner in your cabin!"

"What would you do a deed like this?" cried the horrified officer.

"I will; so, save your vessel and crew, all of us, and release Noel Brandon, or refuse and lose all. Take your choice, and think quick," and Madge stepped away from the wheel, while the terrified men who were aiding her held the vessel on her course as she was heading.

"Oh, what shall I do? Come, aid me in my decision, Raymond and Lauderdale."

"Be quick, for a few cables' length ahead his death, and you know the Devil's Caldron, sir," said Madge.

"I give the prisoner up to you," cried Mayo Maynard, for all of his officers had urged it, seeing that Madge was in deadly earnest.

"Thank you, sir, and I shall save your vessel, for I have your word—hard a-lee!"

The cutter swung away from the danger ahead, bounded along madly, rushed through the second opening of the reef, and was soon quietly riding at anchor under the lee of an island.

"Your vessel is safe, sir, and yonder lies the Blue Bell, which I ordered here to meet me, so I will claim the prisoner," said Madge.

"Will you not wait until to-morrow?"

"No, for here comes a boat from the sloop, and it contains one who will pilot you out to sea whenever you care to go, for I shall depart on the Blue Bell."

"On such a night?"
 "Why not?"
 "The storm is still raging in fury."
 "I care not for that, for the Blue Bell is stanch; here, Melmer, you remain on the cutter and act as pilot, and I will go in the sloop."

"Now, Captain Maynard, will you have the prisoner placed in the boat alongside?" said Madge as Melmer came on deck.

"Brandon, you owe your life to this girl, who is a very Siren of the Sea, and I hope your escape now will enable you some day to prove your innocence. Good-by."

Noel Brandon returned no word, Madge bowed farewell, and then the boat, with Silly Sam and Tom at the oars rowed toward the sloop.

Watching her from the deck of the cutter all saw her dash away under close-reefed sails, and then head landward.

"My God! is she going to run between those islands?" suddenly cried Melmer.

"What is it?" called out Maynard eagerly.

"The pass between those islands cannot be made in such a night—ha! I see that she is forced to attempt it, as the sea will not let her round them—ha! there they go to death—the sloop has struck!" and Melmer covered his face with his hands, while to the ears of all came the tremendous crash that told them the Blue Bell had dashed to destruction.

"And they are lost?" said Maynard hoarsely.

"Yes, sir, all, for I cannot see how any one can swim in that wild sea," replied Melmer.

"God have mercy upon them all," was the fervent prayer of the young commander, as he turned away and entered his cabin.

CHAPTER XL.

CONCLUSION.

THERE was no sleeping on board the Scorpion on that night of storm, and as the sea subsided and winds died away with the morning, Mayo Maynard ordered the life-boat, and under the guidance of Melmer rowed toward the Twin Islands, between which the Blue Bell had been wrecked.

The sloop had gone sheer to pieces, under the mad beating of the waves, and debris covered the rocks; but to the amazement of all, two persons stood upon the beach, and they were hailed with a cheer, for Madge Vernon was one of them.

The other was Silly Sam.

They both were drenched, their clothes torn, and the long hair of Madge hung in tangled masses down her back.

But her face was defiant still, though sad, and as Mayo Maynard sprung ashore, she said:

"Well, sir, I wrecked the Blue Bell, for I could not round the island and so had to try and run between them, which I hardly dared hope to do; but Noel Brandon has escaped the gallows."

"Yes, and met a watery grave; but better than by far than the gallows."

"Did you not have some one else with you?"

"Yes, a poor fellow, Tom Fletcher, but he has gone with Mr. Brandon."

"And how did you escape?"

"Sam here is a superb swimmer and aided me, while I also am like a duck in the water; but I shall have to ask you to land me at my home."

"I will do so only too gladly," and three hours after Madge took to her skiff, with Melmer and Sam, and went shoreward, while the Scorpion went on her way to report the death of Noel Brandon, the fugitive officer.

And through the country spread the news of the wreck of the Blue Bell, and her brave Girl Captain became known as the Siren of the Sea, while the mystery hanging over her father and herself deepened as time went by.

Silly Sam gave up carting and turned sailor, old Captain Kyd still dwelt in his hut, an object of weird interest, and the Brandons moved away from their mansion and left it deserted, so that it soon became known as the Haunted Hall, for it was said that the ghost of the Fugitive Sailor with spirit shipmates, held nightly revels beneath its roof.

[See companion story, "The Siren of the Sea, or, The Corsairs of the Kennebec."]

THE END.

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